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THE MUMMY'S ROMANCE

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THE MUMMY'S ROMANCE

By

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

TRANSLATED BY

G. F. MONKSHOOD

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PREFACE BY THE TRANSLATOR

THEOPHILE GAUTIER, who wrote the book that follows, holds, we cannot say enjoys, a noteworthy place in the land of letters, for he wrote thirty-five books and only thirty of them have been forgotten. Moreover, he wrote a book that the English have accepted, with thanks, and considered a classic, although one of their policemen—now abroad, promoted or assassinated—said it was immoral. Possibly he meant immortal. The five books by Gautier that will not let the world forget them are MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN, LE CAPITAINE FRACASSE, and "last, loneliest, loveliest, exquisite, unique," LE ROMAN DE LA MOMIE. Then there are two volumes of short stories, ROMANS ET CONTES and NOUVELLES. This last one contains THE DREAMLAND BRIDE, translated in this book. So great has been the fame of Gautier in England that the following high-priests of the pen have tended his altar and tomb: Algernon Charles Swinburne, Edgar Saltus, George Saintsbury (assuredly three of the front line of living writers). The short stories have been translated by Lafcadio Hearn and Andrew Lang. Therefore the particular and peculiar genius and talent of Gautier has influenced a great poet, novelist, critic, essayist, and historian: a superb achievement. THE MUMMY'S ROMANCE deserves a larger audience. It is a love-story treating of the great, high passions of a kingly heart, the last great joy that entered a Pharaoh's life. He woos with phrases that gleam with scarlet, purple and gold, and sound in the ear now like the threat of a trumpet, now like the murmur and falter of a voice broken and hesitant through the throbs of the heart: "Va, viens, accoutume toi aux magnificences pharaoniques, puise à même mes trésors, fais couler l'or à flots, amoncelle les pierreries, commande,

fais, défais, abaisse, élève, sois ma maîtresse, ma femme et ma reine. Je te donne l'Égypte avec ses prêtres, ses armées, ses laboureurs, son peuple innombrable, ses palais, ses temples, ses villes; fripe-la comme un morceau de gaze; je t'aurai d'autres royaumes, plus grands, plus beaux, plus riches. Si le monde ne te suffit pas, je conquerrai des planètes, je détrônerai des dieux. Tu es celle que j'aime. Tahoser." Was ever woman in such humour woo'd? But the greatest love-scene in all the story of Queen Tahoser and the most wonderful language also will be found in the Pharaoh's speech that begins, "O Tahoser, I love thee," and ends with the half sad and very human words, "I was a King, almost a God, Tahoser! you have made me a Man." These pages can never be utterly thrust out of the gateway of memory. They sound and shine "exceeding magnifical," and it is easy to imagine that Rathumus the Storywriter may have told some such tale to King Artaxerxes. It is curious that while translating THE MUMMY'S ROMANCE *I read that in "The Valley of Kings" at Thebes there is a lateral valley nearly half-a-mile long, leading up to the mountain. In the winter of 1902-3 Theodore Davis undertook to explore this valley, commencing just above the tomb of Rameses XII. This resulted in the discovery of the tombs of Thôutmôsis IV and Queen Hâtshopsitû. In 1904 he resumed his explorations at the lower end of this valley, but as the work showed little promise of important results he changed his ground to an unexplored space lying between the tombs of Rameses III and Rameses XII. For some time results of the work were discouraging in the extreme. In February, however, the entrance to a tomb was discovered, and in a short while was laid open. The find proved to be one of exceptional interest and importance, being none other than the burial-place of Iouiya and Touiyou, the parents of the great Queen Tiyi, wife of Amenôthes III, the mother of Khouniatonou.*

One remarkable feature of the tomb is that it is the

only one that has ever been found in which the original deposit was in perfect condition.

Perhaps this proem and this present time is a fitting one to discuss the genius of Gautier, his work in words and his play of fancy. There has been no important study of Gautier, in English, for many years. In 1887 Saltus wrote a long, brilliantly-witty introduction to AVATAR. *It appeared in a volume entitled* TALES BEFORE SUPPER. *As these pleasant tales are out of print, and scarce, I will cut from them a small bouquet of flowers of appraisal.*

"*When he first set out to charm that gracious lady whose name is Fame, he was as fabulously handsome as a Merovingian Prince. He was tall and robust; his hair was a wayward flood; his eyes were blue and victorious. He was the image of Young France. His strength was proverbial; he outdid Dante; he swam from Marseilles to the Château d'If, and then swam back. Had it been necessary, he would have breasted the Hellespont. But of that there was no need. There were hearts nearer home that he won without effort; women fell in love with him at once; the Muse smiled, and Glory stretched her hand. His conquests were so numerous that to give an exact account of them the historian would have to write in Latin. In comparison Mardoche was a Puritan; and yet, through a charming contradiction, no one has ever been better supplied with beliefs: he had no less than three hundred and sixty-five, one for every day in the calendar; and it was only on leap year that he allowed himself for twenty-four hours the privilege of believing in nothing at all.*

"*At a comparatively early age he was sunstruck by Victor Hugo. To him Hugo was Phœbus indeed. He has given it to the world that when he was first brought in the presence, like Esther before Ahasuerus, he almost swooned. Envy being cheap and the negation of genius easy, the incident is worth noting; it helps to an under-*

standing of the man, and of the poet that was in him. Throughout those riotous days he was Hugo's henchman. Of the little army that fought for him, Gautier was the most demoniac. His contempt of the humdrum, his enthusiasm for the untried, for liberty in Art, for Hugo, was resplendent in the fantasy of its ornate charm. To talk poetry with Hugo, he said, is like talking theology with God. He did everything for the master. His pen was a scimitar; his ink, Greek fire; he defended, lauded, and worshipped. And when years later, 'so many that the head he bowed had turned to gray,' when Hugo came back from exile, Gautier hastened with a greeting. 'Yes,' he said on his return, 'yes, I really think he remembered me.' Hugo, it may be noted, rhymes with ego, not richly, perhaps, but well.

"*Gautier was a satrap of song: as such his position is not difficult to define. Hugo is the voice of a century; De Musset the sob; Balzac the echo; Baudelaire the sneer; and Gautier the smile—the smile of youth, health, and good looks, the smile of one who held aristocracy to be beauty in woman and intellect in man. He had little in common with the lyric agony of De Musset: his hand was not large enough to wield the thunderbolts which Hugo hurled; he lacked Baudelaire's appreciation of shades of leprous brown; and Balzac's stenographic talent was unpossessed by him. But his facture is irreproachable, which De Musset's is not; his effects are never unintentionally grotesque, as Hugo's often are; his notes are always natural, where Baudelaire's are sometimes forced, and, being a poet, it was easier for him to invent than transcribe.*

"*Gautier wrote in verse before he discovered that it is more difficult to write in prose. Then, abandoning one Muse, he set out to caress the peplum of another.*"

It must be believed that Gautier was a romanticist of the pure and blue blood type. He is the archtype of those who have, with a pen, reconquered the past and made it pay toll and render tribute. To him the veil of

Tanit yet existed, and the cup of mola Circe tendered to Ulysses he would have loved to drink himself. To him Assyria, Media, Persia, Parthia were more real and much more interesting than the siege of Paris could ever be made. The prosperity of shop-keeping France to-day would not attract his vague or wandering glance. This and much more may be seen in his portrait by David D'Angers, the noble head with curling hair that Abot afterwards copied with burin and acid.

It has been said that Gautier lacked humour. But there is humour in THE PRINCESS HERMONTHIS *and* CAPTAIN FRACASSE, *to name but two glories of the quill. Perhaps Hugo was the writer meant and the accuser got muddled. Hugo's poem upon* BOOZ *(by whom he really meant Boaz) was enough to damn him for ever as a person of no humour even if he had not sold to a suffering world* THE LAUGHING MAN. *Like Balzac, the scapulary was often worn by Gautier. He desired it more than the jingling headdress of the fool; but there is plenty of humour in his prose and verse too, only it is not humour to please those who admire the antics of a jumping frog, the clowning of cockneys, or the bargee's repartee. It is the humour Hazlitt loved.*

By what will Gautier live adown the ages of literature yet to be? From what will his present reputation draw its sustenance year after year? Some of his works may be said to be sucked dry, but it is difficult to believe that LA MORTE AMOUREUSE, MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN, *and* LE CAPITAINE FRACASSE *will die while human letters live. I have heard it said that they will live because they are not immoral. That theory cannot go far for want of feet. The* DECAMERON, *the* HEPTAMERON, *and thousands of books relating to Women, Love, and Marriage, are immoral and yet live. To be sure of this fact one has but to glance at the titles of the books in the lists compiled by the industrious Monsieur Gay, or*

the gentleman who is known to the "curious" as Pisanus Fraxi.

The very long picturesque work, LE CAPITAINE FRACASSE, *is moral enough in so far as virtue's triumphs are concerned. Is there not in it a tremendous scene, with hands upon the hilts, all because a duke desires not to disvirginate the lovely lady, but merely to place a patch upon the peach and cream of her bosom! Yet surely even among the hidebound and pudibond there would be no harm in that, while in a comedy of patch and powder it should always be the mode of the moment—*MILITONA, LA TOISON D'OR, JEAN ET JEANNETTE, SPIRITE, *are sufficiently moral. On this point, the morality of Gautier, read what a fine and famous critic has said on some of the books: "No one has ever ventured to impugn the character of* SPIRITE, *or of the* ROMAN DE LA MOMIE; *and though* FORTUNIO *is perhaps an exception to the general run, and is to my fancy a far more immoral, because more heartless book, than the adventures of Mademoiselle de Maupin herself, it stands almost alone. Gautier is lax, but he is seldom or never heartless. The ugliness of mere libertinage has so thoroughly impressed him that he carefully eschews it, and little as he pretended to write for boys and girls, I must confess that there is hardly a book of his which does not seem to me almost of the nature of a moral tonic after a good deal of later literature, English as well as French, and especially after a course of the French novelists who have succeeded him. In this digression . . . I have said all that is necessary on the moral aspect of Gautier, and it may be summed up to the effect that his ardent admiration for beauty preserved him from all the uglier faults of immorality, and often led him back to the accepted code, though by a somewhat roundabout way. The author of* UNE LARME DU DIABLE, *with its exquisite tenderness and respect for innocence, ought to be safe from reproach on this head"*

Of course the morality of that superb story of KING CANDAULES *has often been discussed, and indeed I was quite surprised to see that it has been put into English —though by a man who is a master of mood and emotion. Perhaps the taste for the semi-salacious is on the increase in this brumous paradise. Certainly it is not the fault of the women writers if that taste is not thriving and fattening. Such an incident as is set forth in the* KING CANDAULES *story is almost inconceivable in modern life, or I am convinced that one (or more) of the short-haired sisterhood would have used it as a phase of society's salacity to-day. The success and the justification of such a theme in literature depends wholly and entirely upon its treatment by genius or by gowk, by a loon of letters or a Solon of style.*

Two people handle colour and canvas: one produces a Sargent or Shannon portrait, the other produces passable oilcloth for a servant's stairway. Two people handle sounds and scores: one produces a De Lara or Dé Koven music-drama, the other produces the music of —of the Music Hall. Change the instances as you like, or shift the similes, there remains the resident fact that according to treatment you get harmony or cacophony. Yet a policeman once said publicly that MDLLE. DE MAUPIN *was immoral! Policeman should say these things privately. The great sin in any one of the plastic or graphic arts, the sin that is sure to call down upon the committer the curse of The Nine, is the sin of dullness. The saints were stoned because of it, and in those far-off days people, even the rabble, would have stoned Phidias, Zeuxis, or Alcibiades had they been dull.*

It is vital to be of active intellect, it is fatal to be dull. This law a Pinero, a Saltus, a Bourget dare not break. If the most brilliant portrait-painter began to paint acres of aldermen, where would his lady sitters go, the women with lips of rose-leaves and throats of cream? Saintsbury has said somewhere that once, once only, Gautier, the great artist in words, was dull. The

volume was entitled LA BELLE JENNY. *As it was an early one, written when its author had not matured his method, little need be said, and the famous Professor of Criticism praises practically everything else.* AVATAR *he makes especial reference to, and rightly so. One can with ease imagine how Gautier's artist heart throbbed as he created the portrait of the Countess Labinska.* "*The parasol was now closed, and a woman of incomparable beauty was revealed. Being on horseback, I was able to approach near enough to lose no detail of this poem in flesh. The fair stranger, with the assurance of a perfect blonde, wore a gown of that silvery Nile green which makes any woman whose skin is not irreproachable look as dark as that of a mole. The beautiful shawl of white crêpe de chine, thick with embroidery of the same colour, enveloped her like a Phidian statue in its clinging, rumpled drapery, while a bonnet of fine Florentine straw, covered with forget-me-nots, crowned her. Her only ornament was a gold lizard studded with turquoises which encircled the arm that held the parasol. Thick rippling golden hair lay like undulations of light in luxuriant waves upon her brow, which itself was smooth and white as the new-fallen snow on the highest Alpine peak; long lashes, fine as the threads of gold radiating from the angel heads in the miniatures of the Middle Ages, veiled her eyes, whose pupils had the bluish-green light of a sun-pierced glacier. Her divinely-modelled mouth glowed with the carmine of a sea-shell, and her cheeks resembled white roses flushed by the wooing of the nightingale or the kiss of the butterfly; no mortal brush could copy the suavity, the fairness, and the immaterial transparency of this complexion, of which the tints seemed hardly due to the blood which colours our coarser skins; the first blush of morn on the ridge of the Sierra Nevada, the rose-tipped petals of a camellia, Parian marble seen through a pink gauze veil, can alone give of it a vague idea. The creamy iridescence of the neck, visible between the shawl and the bonnet strings,*

gleamed with opalescent reflections. It was the Venetian colouring, and not the features, that arrested attention, though the latter were as clear-cut and exquisite as the profile of an antique cameo. When I saw her I forgot my past loves, as Romeo at sight of Juliet forgot Rosaline."

Looking over the whole body of Gautier's prose in a "last long lingering look," I think that three romances and a volume of CONTES *are sure of as much literary immortality as such things ever can obtain in a world where brevity of memory is a daily and depressing fact that does not spare the library or show it any special pity. If we accept the great, good Saintsbury once more as our mentor, we must believe that* LA MORTE AMOUREUSE *will merit the perfect praise of men for kalpa upon kalpa of time. Indeed, he says that this story of "a dream-woman of the middle world" is simply unsurpassable. With those fine and definite words what we have to say of this side of the subject may close. But, before the pen reaches the paraph, it would be shameful not to speak of our author's poetry. Indeed, by the clock, his poetry should always come first. It usually does in the authorial life. But one cannot talk for long about Gautier's poetry and expect to be listened to. The coldness and clearness of his* ENAMELS AND CAMEOS *does not suit these present days as much as* THE CARESSES *of Richepin. And yet, if we have not a copy of the* ÉMAUX ET CAMÉES, *what takes its place? The dominant note of the poetry in this wonderful volume is clarity. Everything is clear and shown in the shadowless light in which one should see a filed and finished statuette, poised, rounded, harmonized, perfected like the ivory Aphrodite that Thaïs treasured. Let us at once turn to the volume and quote from a poem that is a triumphant vindication of all this praise and an earnest of the praise that yet shall be. The poem is simply entitled* ART. *The great work, says the poet,*

issues more wonderfully from material that is a rebel to the worker—verse, marble, onyx, enamel.

Lutte avec le Carrare
Avec le Paros dure
Et rare
Gardiens du contour pur.
.
Toute passe.—L'art robuste
Seul a l'éternité,
Le buste
Survit à la cité,
Sculpte, time, cisèle:
Que ton rêve flottant
Se scelle
Dans le bloc résistant!

A critic who is himself a poet of fineness and felicity has recently brought to our minds that for the readers who consider that poetry can be great, independently of great ideas, Gautier is naturally and logically the king of rhyme, a master of descriptive verse, an incomparable word-painter, a carver of gems. GUARDIAN OF PURE CONTOURS! *What a superb title for an artist. Gautier himself would have gloried in it had it been applied to him in his lifetime. It would have meant to him more than Archistrategos meant to Byron, more than Earl meant to Disraeli. But he needs no title. Even as a man can be Emperor and yet wear no purple, can be Pope and yet wear no pallium, so the great writer can create and yet disdain the wreath and the ode. For the splendid spirits of literature, who sway our very souls to-day, wrote because they desired and loved to; their self-expression and self-perfection took them to the heights beyond the stony ways of strife, beyond the carping of the* plèbe immonde. *They could see down "the echoing corridors of time," and for them there was no veil upon veil hiding their immortality from them. The genius is the vice-gerent on earth of the Gods themselves.*

G. F. MONKSHOOD.

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THE MUMMY'S ROMANCE

PROLOGUE

"I HAVE an idea that we shall find in the Valley of Biban-el-Molouk a tomb that has never been tampered with," said to a distinguished young Englishman a certain man of science, much famed for his knowledge of Egypt.

"May Osiris hear you," replied the young English lord; "that is an invocation one should use in front of ancient Diospolis Magna. . . . Many times we have been deceived. The treasure-hunters are always in advance of us."

But his companion continued—

"A tomb that shall not have been ransacked by Egyptians, Greeks, Romans or

Arabs, but that shall deliver up to us, untouched, all the riches of its virgin mystery."

"And upon which you will publish an erudite work which will give you a place with Champollion, Rossellini, Wilkinson, Lepsius and Belzoni?"

"I will dedicate it to you, my lord, for without your royal munificence I should not have been able to test my system by seeing the monuments, and I should have died in my little German town without having contemplated the marvels of this ancient land."

So replied the German doctor who was the young lord's companion. This conversation had taken place near the Nile, at the entry to the Valley of Biban-el-Molouk, between Lord Evandale, mounted on an Arab blood mare, and Doctor Rumphius, mounted on an ass.

The vessel that had brought them up the Nile, and was their temporary home, was moored the other side of the Nile, before Luxor, with furled sails. After having given several days to visiting and studying the astounding ruins of Thebes —gigantic fragments of a city of splendour —they had crossed the river and directed their steps to the arid belt of land that held within its breast the tombs of the ancient inhabitants of the palaces that once stood on the other side of the water. Some attendants followed his lordship and the doctor, and others calmly smoked upon the vessel in the cabin's shade.

Lord Evandale was one of those young Englishmen who appear to be beyond reproach in every way; a fine example of British high life. He had, too, the disdainful attitude that comes of the possession of a large inherited fortune and an

historic name fully described in the *Peerage and Baronetage*, the second Bible of the English. In appearance he was almost too handsome for a man. Indeed, the pure lines of face and head recalled the models of Meleager or of Antinous. The clear colour of the lips and cheeks seemed artificial, created by cosmetics. His hair was blond and naturally wavy. A hairdresser or valet could not have improved its appearance. However, the firm gaze of his steely-blue eyes and a kind of sneer upon the lips corrected any impression people formed as to his rather effeminate appearance. A member of the Yacht Club, the young lord from time to time, by caprice, took a trip upon his light craft *Puck*. It was furnished like a boudoir, and managed by a few chosen sailors. This year he had chosen Egypt, and his yacht awaited him at Alexandria. He had

brought with him a man of science, a doctor, a naturalist, a draughtsman and photographer, so that his tour could be turned to a good account. He himself was a well-informed man, and his social success had not made him forget his honours at Cambridge. He was dressed with the right note of style and scrupulous care that is one of the distinguishing marks of the Englishman. They are as careful of their attire upon the sands of the desert as upon the sands and promenades of the seaside or the storied stones of the West End.

He was at this time principally in white clothing, because of the heat of the sun. Upon his head there was a very finely-made Panama, with a green gauze puggree. Rumphius, the Egyptologist, still wore the usual black costume of the man of science in spite of the heat, and one

could see that he cleaned his pen upon his right trouser leg. His cravat was knotted carelessly around the prominent "apple" in his throat. He was dressed with true scientific negligence, and he was most certainly not a handsome man. Some reddish hair streaked with grey stuck out behind his prominent ears. He was bald, and had a long nose. He brought to one's mind the figure of an ibis, perhaps a suitable simile for one who deciphered Egyptian cartouches.

The lord and the doctor made for the rocks of the funeral valley of Biban-el-Molouk, necropolis used for the royalties of ancient Thebes, conversing in the style of the phrases we have quoted, when coming out like a cave-dweller from the black mouth of a sepulchre (often the homes of fellahs) they saw a personage who was strange to them, and who saluted. He

was a Greek dealer in and maker of antique things, selling the new when he could not get the old. Nothing about him reminded one of the commonplace type that tricks the traveller. He wore a red cap, and was freshly barbered. His olive skin, black brows, nose and predatory eyes, his big moustaches and deeply-dented chin, would all have made up a brigand's aspect, if it had not been tempered by a servile smile. This Greek had closely observed the yacht, and had decided that the owner could be "exploited." He therefore waited his time to pounce, regarding all the funeral domain as his property, turning all away who would dispute that with him. With the skill peculiar to the mercantile Greek, from the first sight of Lord Evandale he had calculated, or tried to, the amount of his wealth.

He renounced the idea of showing the noble Englishman round the tombs that had been "done" hundreds of times. In this case, he thought, it was of no use to turn over places where nothing was to be found—places he had long ago denuded himself and profited by in the highest market overt. Argyropoulos (that was the Greek's name) in exploring the valley had found the entry to a place that had escaped the usual explorer. For two years he guarded his secret from other tomb-robbers. Now he approached Lord Evandale.

"Has your lordship any intention of enterprising some researches?" Argyropoulos spoke in a sort of cosmopolitan dialect. "If so I can find you a hundred fellahs who with their bare nails could scrape away the earth to its centre! We would lay bare a sphinx, an altar, a tomb."

Seeing that the great lord remained calm and cool as he heard the foregoing phrases, and that the smile of the sceptic wavered upon the lips of the savant with him, Argyropoulos at once understood that he was not trading with fools, and he became convinced that the best thing he could next do would be to sell to these people, in this splendid market, his great discovery. Upon this find of his he really placed a high price, in his thoughts about it; he wanted to get enough from the idea for an income and a marriage portion for his daughter.

"I can see that you are savants and not merely travellers, and that common curiosity does not call you here or detain you," continued he, talking a mixture of Greek, Arabic, Italian and English. "I can reveal to you the place where there is a tomb that has escaped the search of all.

No one knows of it but my sole self, for it is a treasure that I have most closely guarded until the day came when some one worthy should be told the precious secret."

"Some one who would pay you a worthy price?" said and smiled the lord.

"My love of truth forbids that I should contradict your lordship. I live in great hope of making a good price as payment for my discovery. Each lives in this land by his own little industry: I live by digging up the Pharaohs and selling them to strangers. They are becoming very rare; there are certainly not enough for all the world of seekers. It is an article in great demand that they have not been making for some time!"

"That is a fact," said the doctor; "it is centuries since the embalmers shut up shop, and the tranquil quarters of the dead

have been deserted by the living of this land."

The Greek sent a keen glance at the speaker, but continued talking to his lordship.

"For a tomb of great age that no human being had touched since the priests left the dead is a thousand pounds too much money? It is nothing to pay for such a thing. Perhaps the tomb has masses of gold, necklaces of diamonds and pearls, earrings of sapphires and rubies, and ancient gods moulded of precious metals."

"Trickster!" said Rumphius. "You reel off a string of treasures that you know full well one does not now find in Egyptian tombs."

Argyropoulos, seeing clearly that his clever nonsense left them quite cold and unimpressed, dropped it at once, and turn-

ing to Evandale said plainly and very pointedly—

"Very good, my lord. Is it to be a bargain at my price as I have stated?"

"Go on, then," said the young lord. "A thousand pounds if the tomb has never been opened (as you represent to us), and . . . nothing at all if a single stone has been touched by the tools of any one."

"Also upon this condition," added the prudent Rumphius: "that we can take away if we wish all that we shall find in the tomb."

"I accept," said the Greek, with an assured air. "You can advance your gold and banknotes."

"My good Rumphius,' said Lord Evandale to his friend, "your dreams are to become true. This droll creature seems most positive about this find of his."

"Heaven grant us that he is in earnest,

and that we shall have success," said the savant. "The Greeks are such terrible liars; it has passed into a proverb."

"This man is a Greek—past a doubt," replied the lord. "But I think, however, that this time, though it may be for this time only, he is indeed speaking the truth."

The Director of the Ruins went before the savant and the lord with the air of a master of the ceremonies. They soon arrived at the narrow defile that gave one the entrance to the Valley of Biban-el-Molouk. It looked more like a cutting made by the hand of man through the thick wall of the mountain than a natural opening.

The genius of solitude seemed to have wished to keep unseen from men's eyes this dwelling-place of the dead. Pieces of broken sculpture could be seen about, until at last the valley, becoming a little

larger, presented a spectacle of dull desolation.

On each side were rocks scarred, calcined, by the pitiless sun. In the flanks of the rocks opened here and there great black gaps or mouths, surrounded by blocks of stone, broken and in disorder. They were square holes flanked by columns storied with signs and cartouches (or names of the kings), and of the gods and goddesses. They were the tombs of the old-time kings of Thebes. At last it would seem their goal drew near, for Argyropoulos pointed out an enormous stone, and said with an air of triumphal satisfaction—

"*It is there!*"

He clapped his hands, and from all around them fellahs appeared with picks, hammers and all necessary tools. The Greek made a sign to some of the most

robust, who put levers under the big mass of rock. It was moved, and two others as well. Then the entrance to a tomb appeared, a sort of square doorway hollowed in the rock. At the sides were pillars. The doorway was ornamented with hieroglyphics. Behind a wall of stone and brick they soon found a sort of flagstone that formed the door leading to the subterranean place of sepulchre. The German savant found the seal of the tomb intact.

"I really believe," he said, "that we have succeeded," he cried.

"Do not let us rejoice too soon," said Lord Evandale. "Belzoni made a great mistake once. *His* great find in the way of an 'unopened' tomb had been opened at another side."

"But here," said Rumphius, "the mountain chain is too great for any such

opening to have been made by these men and these means."

The men now attacked the great stone that masked any further door or passage, unearthing many tiny little images as they did so: images laid there by friends as we to-day lay flowers near the dead.

The door opened . . . it was the first time it had done so for thirty-five centuries, and the mountain, through this opened mouth, seemed to sigh with an air of relief. More hieroglyphics were the first things they saw with what little light there was. Torches were now lit, and they all pressed forward.

At the end of the passage was another sealed door of stone. The heat was intense. Argyropoulos sent for sponges full of fresh water, and these they breathed through. The second door was now down, and a stairway showed a sharp descent.

"Ouf!" gasped the doctor at the bottom of the stair. "The heat increases as we go on. We cannot be very far now from the abode of the damned."

Another passage followed, then they were all brought to a halt before a pit. A torch was cast down, and it lit up the hole, making it gleam like the great eye of a cyclops.

"Even to-day people are not more cunning than were the dead Egyptians," said Lord Evandale. "All these labyrinths, cut hither and thither; these cells, passages, doors and pits—surely they must very effectually cool the passion or zeal of robbers and savants?"

"It all makes very little difference to them, none the less," quickly answered the man who was a savant himself and knew. "The robbers who come seek gold; the men of science seek Truth.

Now these two things are the most precious in the world."

Argyropoulos now cried: "Bring the knotted rope. We must explore the pit."

The rope was held, and the Greek went down it, sounding the walls.

Evandale and Rumphius, fevered with curiosity and anxiety, peered over the pit —at the great risk of pitching head downwards—and followed the searching of the Greek with the most intense interest.

When Argyropoulos came up again he showed the deepest chagrin on his face and bit his lips.

"There is not the least sign down there of any passage . . . and yet the excavation could not possibly have stopped there."

"Nevertheless," said Rumphius, "the Egyptian who ordered this tomb may have died in a foreign land. . . ."

"Well, if he did, would they not have given up the workings here? It is not at all unlikely, and, indeed, has been known to have actually happened."

Lord Evandale answered: "Let us hope that by virtue of constant searches we encounter some secret issue. If not, could we make a transversal gallery or passage from another part of the mountain?"

"These damnable Egyptians were so full of cunning when they hid their dead," muttered the Greek. "One can see them mocking, in their day, the people who were to come after."

He followed his remarks by more close peering at the walls of the little chamber above the pit. All at once he seemed to be lit up by a fine idea, and turned sharply upon his heels. His old experience as an exploiter of ruins and monuments came to

his aid and helped him to remember a similar fix. Also the desire to gain that thousand pounds sharpened his wits wonderfully. He took a pick and struck at the walls. *At last a wall sounded hollow.* He cried out in triumph, and his eyes glittered. The two chief watchers clapped their hands.

"Strike away at that wall."

The command was soon obeyed, and an opening made through which a man could pass into a gallery that wound into the interior of the mountain, ending in a square chamber pillared and painted with figures. This chamber led to another a little higher, and with only two pillars, but similarly ornamented. This chamber did not appear to have any outlet. All hope was lost! They were compelled to retrace their steps because of the terrible heat in that almost airless place.

"None the less," said the doctor, "this labyrinth was not made for sheer amusement. There *must* be another passage that leads to . . . something. Without doubt the dead man or woman had a fear of being disturbed, and was securely sealed up somewhere. Where? With sufficient insistence one can get anywhere, and I think yet that we shall make discoveries. Probably a flagstone masked in some way covers the true descent to the funeral chamber."

"You are right, I believe, dear doctor," said Evandale. "Let us search again and again."

They struck every corner, every stone. At last, near a pillar, it sounded hollow, and when the dust of centuries had been cleared away an oblong flagstone was seen clearly marked out.

"I am half ashamed to take so many

steps to trouble the last sleep of the poor body that is here somewhere," now said Lord Evandale.

The stone was raised, and a staircase discovered that led to a chamber with little crypts, containing figures made of enamel, bronze and sycamore. As they pressed forward into the chamber Lord Evandale had a strange sensation assail him. Modern life and all that it stood for to him seemed to pass away, out of sight and touch, out of thought. He forgot Great Britain, and the great fact that his name was upon the roll of its nobility, that he was one of its "titled and landed" class. Forgot, too, his home in Lincolnshire, his town house in the London West End, his yacht, and all that made or aided his English life. An unseen hand put back the clock of time, had turned again the hour-glass of the ages. Sand by sand

the centuries fell silently, sadly, as hours pass in the silence and solitude of the night. History was there, in the past, not here and now, viewed with the eyes of to-day. Moses lived, Pharaoh reigned, and he, the Lord Evandale, felt it strange that he was not coiffured and dressed as an Egyptian noble would be when in the presence of the royalty of Egypt. Then, too, a touch of religious horror came to him, for had he not violated this palace of the half-divine, royal dead—defended though it had been with such care against the hand of the profaner?

The attempt, and its success so far, now seemed to him impious and a sacrilege, and he said—

"If there is a Pharaoh here he might rise upon his couch and strike me with his sceptre!"

For an instant he wished to let fall

again for ever the stone screens that had tried to hide the corpse of this ancient dead civilization. But the doctor had other ideas. Dominated by his scientific enthusiasm, he cried in a loud voice—

"My lord, the sarcophagus is quite intact!"

This sentence recalled his lordship again to the things of real life. By a lightning leap of the mind he crossed again the centuries that his reveries had built up, and replied—

"In all truth, is it, my dear doctor, intact?"

"Unheard-of good fortune, marvellous chance, treasure-trove never to be equalled!" continued the doctor, with a deep and erudite joy.

Argyropoulos, seeing the enthusiasm of the doctor, had a feeling of remorse, the first he had ever had in his life. He now

wished he had asked a great deal more. He told himself that he had been a simpleton, and that the young noble had got the best of the bargain. He made many resolutions to fare better in any similar affair in future days.

To increase the joy of sight in the find the fellahs had by now lit all their torches. The spectacle was strange and magnificent in the passages and chambers that led to the resting-place of the sarcophagus. Lord Evandale and Rumphius remained stupefied with admiration, although they were already familiar with the glories of funeral art in ancient Egypt.

Illuminated thus, the gilded salon showed, perhaps for the first time, the bright colours of its wall-paintings. Reds, blues, greens and whites shone with a virginal freshness from the golden varnish that served as a background to the figures and hieroglyphs.

In the midst there arose the massive sarcophagus, that had been hollowed in an enormous block of black basalt and closed with a rounded cover of the same material. The four sides of the monolith were covered with sculptures cut as carefully in intaglio as would be the gem in a ring.

At the angles of the sarcophagus were four alabaster vases with chased covers. These four vessels contained certain of the inner parts of the mummy, and at the head of the tomb an effigy of Osiris seemed to watch the ever-sleeping dead.

"Open the sarcophagus," said his lordship, "but with great care in the use of your levers, for I would like to take this tomb, perfect, for the British Museum."

When the bier was at last opened, Rumphius, to his surprise, found the enswathed figure must be that of a woman,

owing to the absence of the Osirian beard and also from the form of the wrapping. The Greek also expressed astonishment. It was a unique thing in his long experience, for the Valley of Biban-el-Molouk is the "Saint Denis" of old-time Thebes, and contained but the tombs of kings. The necropolis of the queens is situated further in another gorge of the mountain. Then, the tombs of the queens were very simple, and composed usually of one or two chambers. Women were regarded as inferior to men even in death. The greater number of such tombs, violated in far-off ages, have served as receptacles for mummies of the deformed and poorly embalmed.

This disturbs," said the doctor, "all my thoughts and theories and overthrows the most firmly-seated system of Egyptian funeral rites followed exactly and closely

for thousands of years! . . . We are brought face to face with some obscure custom or happening of those days; a lost mystery of history. A woman was seated upon the throne of the Pharaohs and governed Egypt. She was named

TAHOSER,

if one can believe the writing in the cartouches, that are most ancient. Can this woman have usurped a tomb and a throne?"

"No one but yourself can better solve all the problems of the affair," said Lord Evandale. "We will take this case of secrets and mysteries to our vessel, and there you can unravel it all at your ease, even as the great Champollion could."

The fellahs therefore worked and got the coffer on to the yacht.

Argyropoulos, having arranged near

the great case all the objects that had been found around it, held himself to attention, respectfully, at the door of the yacht's cabin. Lord Evandale understood, and paid him his gold.

The coffin rested in the middle of the cabin, and shone with colour as though it had been painted yesterday. It moulded the mummy within. Never had the ancient land of Egypt, in all its long history, wrapped one of its dead children better for the unending repose. The mummy-case shaped out the head and shoulders, and one seemed to perceive a young and graceful body beneath the thick coloured casing. The golden death-mask, with its long Egyptian eyes, outlined with black and enamel; the delicate winged nose, rounded cheeks and thick lips, smiling yet with the indescribable smile of the Sphinx; the chin with its short

curve—all offered to the beholder an example of the purest type of the ideal Egyptian, and by many little characteristic details, that art had not invented, an individual portrait was clearly indicated. A multitude of fine curls tightly knotted fell upon each side of the mask in opulent masses.

A large breastplate of fine enamel and gold circled the base of the throat, and then in many rows descended, outlining the firm shape of breasts that were as two mounds of gold. Upon the breast-bandages were many hieroglyphics, prominent among them the *Tau*, that most mysterious sign that is emblem of Immortality. One long band covered with writing was wound from breast to feet. It contained, perchance, some formula of the funeral art, or more likely the names and qualities of the dead beauty. Rumphius meant to translate it all later.

All the writings or paintings, by their form and style (or quality of design) in line, colour, etc., showed to the trained eye of an Egyptologist that they were fashioned in the most beautiful period of Egyptian art.

The lord and savant now took the form from its mummy-case and stood it against a wall of the cabin. It was indeed a strange spectacle. The swathed and golden-masked dead, standing upright as though it was a spectre that had materialized, and was taking anew an attitude of life, after having kept for so long the horizontal pose of death upon its bed of basalt deep in the heart of a mountain. The soul of the dead had counted upon eternal repose for its body, and must indeed have been deeply moved could it have known that all the care that had been taken to keep the resting-place inviolate was now made futile, abortive!

"What a beautiful attire for the dead," said Rumphius, contemplating the mummy. "It is a young woman, past a doubt, that is wrapped in these bands of linen, yellowed by time and the spices and scents of the embalmer. Compared with the Egyptians we are truly barbarians, possessed by a brutal sort of life, and we have no delicate sense of the supreme and particular dignity and beauty of Death. What tenderness, what regrets, what love was revealed in these minute cares, these almost endless precautions, these really useless acts of attention that none were meant to see or enjoy! It was a struggle to save from utter, complete death, that is, entire destruction, the form of the adored; a struggle against great odds to keep everything intact for the soul when it should come to reanimate the body in the day of supreme union"

"Perhaps," replied Lord Evandale, "our civilization is but a decadence. We are absurdly proud of a few recent inventions, and rarely think of the colossal splendours of Egypt's ancient land. We have steam, but it is less than the ideas that raised the Pyramids, hollowed those mountains and cut a stone hill into a Sphinx or obelisk, and knew how to save and defend the fragile human corpse from Time the destroyer. These people had the 'sense of eternity,' and it shows itself in their life and art."

"Oh," answered Rumphius, "the Egyptians were astonishing artists, savants and priests, but we end by tearing their secrets from them. . . . Come, let us unwrap this youthful beauty as delicately as possible."

"Poor lady!" murmured the young lord. "Profane eyes are to see that which perhaps even Love did not. In the name of

Science we are as savage as the Persians of Cambyses."

The doctor removed the wrappings of the body, and, the last obstacle removed, the young woman was seen in all the chaste nudity of her beautiful form, guarding, in spite of the centuries, all the roundness of her former contours and the supple grace of her pure lines of breed. Her pose, rare among mummies, was that of the Venus of Milo, as though the Master of the Embalmers had wished with this sweet form to take away the sad, straight attitude and rigidity of the dead.

A cry of admiration came from the two beholders. Never did Greek or Roman statue offer a more elegant figure for the delight of the eye. The particular character of the ideal Egyptian gave to the beautiful body, so superbly preserved, a lightness of line that antique marbles rarely

have. The fine hands and feet, with nails of polished agate; the cup of the breast, small and pointed; the swelling of the hip and thigh; the long leg, that recalled grace of dead players and dancers—all was of a type of grace that was very youthful, and yet had the perfection, the completeness of the woman. As a rule mummies saturated with bitumen and natrum resemble ebony figures. Dissolution cannot take them, but all appearances of life depart. They do not return to the dust, but become, as it were, petrified into a hideous form that one can only behold with fright or disgust. But here, the body prepared with great care and huge cost had preserved more nearly the look of flesh and of life. The warm and amber tone of flesh that one admires so much in the pictures of Titian or Giorgione must have been the lovely young Egyptian's tint in life. The head

seemed sleeping, but it was a sleep of thirty centuries. Her body was almost covered with exquisite gold, gems and jewels.

Strange sensation, indeed, to be face to face with a glorious human being who lived when History and her records were vague and misty. A beautiful creature who was certainly contemporary with Moses, and still owned much of the glory of youth. Imagine touching a little hand that had probably been kissed by a Pharaoh, or that hair, more lasting than empires, more enduring than monuments of granite!

At the sight of the denuded form of the lovely lady, who must have queened it ages before, the young lord experienced that retrospective desire that a fine picture or statue can cause if it represents one who was famous for her charms: he thought

that he would have loved her could he have lived in those ancient centuries, and his thought, a spiritual one, went forth, as it were, into the void to tell her soul.

Rumphius, less poetic, took an inventory of all the gems and jewels. Evandale did not desire them removed; to take the jewels from a dead woman is to kill her a second time!

All at once a roll of papyrus, hidden beneath the arm of the dead woman, caught the doctor's eye.

"My lord," said he with deep intentness, "we have the best of the man Argyropoulos, after all. This is the first time men have found an Egyptian manuscript containing any other than mere hieratic formulas. I will decipher it and learn your secret, oh, you lovely dead thing! Moreover, I will by so doing cover myself with glory and be equal to

Champollion. As for Lepsius, he shall die of jealousy!"

* * * * *

They returned to Europe, and the mummy was placed in the park of Lord Evandale in Lincolnshire. Often his lordship gazed at the coffin, dreamt and . . . longed. After long study Rumphius translated the papyrus, and it now follows.

CHAPTER I

OPH—the Egyptian name of the town that antiquity called Thebes of the Hundred Gates, or Diospolis Magna—seemed to lay asleep under the devouring action of a sun of lead. It was midday. A white light came from a pale sky and fell upon an earth that swooned with heat. The sun glittered like polished metal, and there was very little shade to be seen at the base of the buildings—only a slight, bluish band. The houses, with sloping sides, shone with heat like bricks in an oven. All doors were closed, and at the windows no head was to be seen. At the end of the empty streets and above the terraces were to be seen the clear points of obelisks. Glimpses were also seen of palaces and temples, with pillars whose

capitals were sometimes formed as the typical Egyptian face, sometimes formed as a lotus. From time to time above the wall of a garden one saw a palm, scaly-trunked and waving on high its fan-tracery of leaves. Rare slaves of the Nahasi race, black and simian-faced, braved the ardour of the sun to get Nile water.

In spite of the heat on this day, all were not asleep in Thebes. From the walls of a grand palace came a vague murmur of music. Stifled almost by the thickness of the walls, the music had an unusual sweetness. It was a song of half-sad pleasure and drawn-out languor, meant to express the fatigue of the body and the weariness of passion. By the wall of the palace the slave forgot the whip of his taskmaster in listening to the song that had so many heartaches in it—lost lands of desire, dreams that never came true, broken

loves and the unconquerable obstacles of Fate. . . .

Within a chamber of the palace, near the wall, was a curious-shaped bed, or couch, representing an ox. In the middle of the chamber was a table of precious woods, covered with articles of the toilette. Near this table, upon a lounge, was seated a young girl of wondrous beauty, in an attitude of melancholy and nonchalance. Her features were of an ideal delicacy, the pure Egyptian type, and often sculptors had thought of her in making their images of Isis or Hathor. Lights of gold and rose tinted the pallor of her skin. Her long, black, Osirian eyes were lengthened in outline by threads of antimony. The large, sombre eyes, long-lashed and heavy-lidded, had a strange expression, set as they were in a face that was small, almost infantine. The half-opened mouth, show

ing the white of the teeth, was softly smiling. The pure lines of nose, cheek and chin gave the whole face an expression of sweetness, grace and extreme charm. She was sumptuously dressed and bejewelled. Her name was Tahoser. Near her knelt a young woman harpist playing upon a nine-stringed harp. Behind her was another player, and a third girl marked the measure of the music upon a little drum.

The harpist sang a plaintive song, accompanied by the others in sweetest unison. The words expressed vague hopes, veiled regrets, unknown loves and timid sorrow at the cruelty of the gods and fate.

Tahoser, an elbow resting upon her couch, heard with an attention more affected than real the tender song of the musicians. Sometimes she sighed; a tear came, and she bit her lower lip.

"Satou," she cried, clapping her hands for silence, "your song enervates like a heavy perfume, and causes a heartache."

"Mistress mine," replied the harpist, "the poet and the singer know all things; the gods reveal to them many hidden things. But if my song saddens I will change it for one with more joy in it." And Satou attacked the strings of the harp with a joyful energy, and sung a song celebrating the charm of wine, the beauty of perfumes and the delirium of the dance.

Other attendants of Tahoser now danced as the music rose and fell in delicious sounds.

But Satou's music did but deepen the sadness of Tahoser, and she sobbed out upon the breast of her favourite—

"Oh! my poor Nofre, I am very sad and very unfortunate!"

CHAPTER II

NOFRE made a sign of understanding; she knew a confidence was coming. The harpist, dancers and others withdrew. Then the favourite said in a soft, wheedling tone—

"What ails you, dear Mistress, that you should be sad and unhappy? Are you not young, beautiful enough for the most beauteous to envy you, free, and your father, the High Priest Petamounoph, whose mummy is in a rich tomb, left you great wealth to spend as you will? Your palace is very beautiful, your gardens are vast, and watered with fine fountains. Your coffers contain many jewels, and your robes are as numerous as the days of the year. Yet your heart, which should open with joy, like a lotus in the month of Hathor, is shut and sad!"

Tahoser replied to Nofre: "Yes, certainly the gods have favoured me. But of what avail are all the things one possesses if one lacks a deeply-wished-for thing? . . . A desire unsatisfied leaves the rich man as poor in his palace as is a slave or a negro. . . ."

Nofre smiled with a slight air of raillery.

"Is it possible, O Mistress, that there is any one of your lightest wishes that cannot be gratified at once? If you dream of a beautiful jewel an artist makes it . . . robes, perfumes, flowers, or any rich foods you desire, all must come to you. Your slaves at Philæ, at Heliopolis, seek lovely and rare things to pleasure you. If Egypt does not hold what you want, cannot the caravans bring it to you from the ends of the earth!"

Tahoser moved her pretty head, but

was impatient of the path her favourite's thought took.

"Pardon, Mistress," said Nofre, seeing she was making a mistake. "Ah, I did not recall that for four months Pharaoh has led his expedition to Upper Ethiopia, and that the handsome officer accompanied His Majesty. How splendid he looked in military attire—fine, young and valiant."

Tahoser blushed, but did not speak or stop the speaker.

"Mistress, your regret shall cease. A courier announces the King's arrival before sundown. All are going to see the triumphal return. Will you not throw off your languor and also see the spectacle? Ahmosis will observe and smile upon you, and you will return to the palace quite joyous."

"Ahmosis loves me; but I do not love Ahmosis," replied Tahoser.

"A virgin's saying," replied Nofre, who did not think Tahoser spoke quite candidly. For Ahmosis was a fine figure of a man in every way. Still Tahoser did not love him, and spoke truly to her confidante.

Another idea, that she did not express to Nofre, came to Tahoser. She shook off her lassitude and rose, bidding Nofre prepare her for going forth. The palace of Tahoser was only separated from the Nile by gardens. Attended by Nofre and others, Tahoser went through shaded paths to her quay. Every one was making for the Nile that day—Egyptians, Negroes, bronzed Ethiopians, Asiatics, Pelagians and others.

Through this crowd advanced very gravely shaven-pate priests, soldiers, aristocrats. Along the walls of the buildings shuffled women bent beneath the burden of children. Beautiful women of

the higher classes, attended by several slaves, passed proudly in long semi-transparent robes and laden with jewels. Their bodies as they passed exhaled the fragrance of flowers and aromatics. Litters also passed, borne by Ethiopians with rapid and rhythmic steps.

An extraordinary movement was taking place upon the Nile—covered, in spite of the breadth, by vessels of every kind in Egypt. Tahoser entered her own vessel, which was decorated with great richness. She soon reached the other bank, and her chariot was there for her at the same time. Nofre held the reins of the white oxen that drew the chariot and conducted the vehicle, while Tahoser rested motionless by her side. The two girls formed a charming group upon the coloured car.

On this side of the river the inhabitants of the quarter called Memnonia and the

villages near arrived, and each minute swelled the crowd of the curious. Thebes itself was as deserted as though a conqueror had come and led the populace into captivity.

The frame of this wonderful river picture was a worthy one. In the midst of verdant palms there rose the vivid colouring of pleasure-houses and summer dwellings, palaces and pavilions, with all around sycamores and mimosas. Fountains mirrored the sun and vines enlaced upon the trellis-work. Then the eye took in the gigantic silhouette of the palace of Rhamses-Meïamoun, and further north the two colossi enthroned impassive, a mountain of granite in human form before the entry to the Amenophium, half masking the Rhamsesium much further, and the tomb of the High Priest, but allowing to be seen the palace of Menephta

Tahoser regarded vaguely the perspective that was so familiar to her, and her eyes (now the home of distraction) had no admiration. But in passing before a house almost hidden in a mass of luxuriant vegetation she drew out of her reverie, and appeared to seek upon the terrace of the house some known and longed-for figure.

A superb young man leaned against a column of the terrace and carelessly scanned the crowded river. But his sombre eyes did not seek for or rest upon the chariot that held Tahoser and Nofre. Nevertheless the little hand of the daughter of Petamounoph grasped nervously the front of her chariot and her cheeks paled, and she buried them in her lotus-flower bouquet.

CHAPTER III

In spite of her customary shrewdness Nofre had not noticed the effect upon her mistress the unknown disdainful one had produced. She had not observed the paleness, followed by a blush, nor the vivid lighting up of the eyes, and quickened rise and fall of the bosom. True, her entire attention was taken up in directing the chariot, a very difficult thing to do among the masses, more and more compact, of idlers and loungers who wanted to be present at the triumphal entry of the Pharaoh.

Finally the chariot arrived upon the field of operations, an immense plain well chosen for displays of military pomp and circumstance. Tahoser and Nofre, whose servants had made a place for them, now

heard a great rumour, heavy, deep and powerful, like the onrush of a sea. It could be heard coming from afar, yet it drowned all the murmurs of the vast crowd. Soon the peculiar noise of the rolling of war chariots could be heard, and the rhythmic tramp of foot soldiers. A fog of dust arose. It was produced by an army on the march, and hung over the countless thousands of spectators.

The tumult grew. The clouds of dust parted, and hundreds of musicians debouched into the immense arena, to the great satisfaction of the mob, who, in spite of their respect for Pharaoh and his majesty, were tired of standing beneath a sun that would have melted any heads but Egyptian heads.

The advance guard of musicians halted, and the College of Priests and deputations of the chief people of Thebes came and

ranged themselves in poses of respect. The musicians, a small army themselves, were composed of players upon drums, tambourines, trumpets, sistrums and triangles.

Strings of captives, men and women, now came into view, chained and guarded, then the standard-bearers, and between the latter a herald, who proclaimed the victories of Pharaoh, his captives, loot and conquered races and cities. At last Pharaoh himself came, preceded by priests and incense-burners. Now a remarkable thing happened. . . . In passing before the spot where stood Tahoser and Nofre, the Pharaoh, whose litter was borne above the heads of the crowd upon the shoulders of some officers, was upon a level with the head of the lovely girl. The King slowly fixed upon her his dark, keen regard. He did not turn his

head round; not a muscle in the face moved; indeed, the face was like the gold mask of a mummy. Nevertheless the dark eyes had clearly seen Tahoser, and a spark of desire had lit their sombre discs. He half lifted a hand and made a certain sign to one near his side. The man saw the daughter of Petamounoph—saw and understood.

CHAPTER IV

THE mighty Pharaoh had arrived at his palace, situated near the scene of his great greeting and upon the left bank of the Nile.

In the transparent blueness of the night the immense edifice assumed proportions yet more colossal than usual, cutting its vast angles into the background with a vigour that was awesome and sombre. The idea of a power that was utter, absolute, attached itself to the mass of the palace; eternity itself, one would think, could but act upon such buildings as a single drop of water would act upon a great block of marble.

The Pharaoh rested, refreshed himself, and, surrounded by his court, heard music and saw dancing. But he gave no sign of

being pleased by any one or anything, and he retired to his private apartments without having spoken a single word. Motionless upon the threshold stood the servant who had obeyed the gesture during the triumphal entry. This man bowed and spoke—

"O King, beloved of the gods, I left your side and crossed the Nile in a little boat. I followed the vessel of the woman upon whom your royal regard fell. . . . She is Tahoser, daughter of the priest Petamounoph."

Pharaoh smiled, and answered that he was pleased. His messenger was richly rewarded.

CHAPTER V

Upon the left bank of the Nile stretched the villa of Poëri, the young noble who had so troubled the dreaming eyes of Tahoser when in going to see the triumphal entry of Pharaoh she had passed in her chariot under the balcony where the handsome one indolently lounged. It was a fine property that he held, partaking of the nature of country house and farm. Stone walls shut in the gardens, storehouses for grain, etc. There were three gateways, and a pavilion built near the wall gave views of the gardens and of the road. This pavilion did not resemble the usual style of a rich man's house in Thebes. Its architect had sought and obtained a light elegance, a freshness and simplicity of country grace, so to speak, in harmony

with the verdure and repose of life away from the city. Above the ground floor of the house was a gallery of many columns. This was open to all the winds of heaven. The whole construction was painted in colours—tender, joyous tints and shades; the lotus of the capitals of the columns alternated blue with rose and green. All around the pavilion the earth was cultivated, and fruit, flower and tree spread and flourished.

The great garden, lit by the sun, had an aspect of gaiety, of sweet repose and happiness. The green of the trees was so vivid, the flowers so profuse, and the air and light bathed so generously the whole balmy enclosure.

One might say of the place that it was an earthly Eden, built as one would build a dwelling in which dreams were to come true. . . . But now the door of the

pavilion opens, and Poëri appears upon its step. Although he was dressed in the Egyptian fashion, his features did not reflect the usual national type. One could see he was not of the original race of dwellers by the Nile. The small eagle nose, the cheeks, the fine lips, the oval face, were all different from the customary face of the Egyptians. Then, too, his face was warm olive in colour, and his eyes of deepest blue. He was of an unusual type of male beauty, and the daughter of Petamounoph had not been able to remain calm in seeing him. From the day when she had first seen him leaning in his favourite place in the gallery, or balcony, of his house, many times she had returned, driving her chariot along below him.

But, remarkable to relate, though Tahoser dressed in the finest tunics and robes, wore a breastplate of diamonds and many

other jewels, though she did all that was possible to attract, Poëri had not appeared to offer her any attention. . . .

Nevertheless, Tahoser was very beautiful, and the loveliness that the lord of the pavilion ignored or disdained Pharaoh himself had coveted. For that love the great lord of all the upper and lower land of Egypt would give the most beauteous women of his harem; would give his hordes of Asiatic captives; would give his vases of gold and his coffers of gems and jewels, his chariots of war, his army, his throne, and last, perhaps greatest, his tomb, that thousands and thousands of slaves had toiled upon for a lifetime! . . .

Ah, love is not the same under Eastern skies, where one breathes a wind of fire, as it is on the shores of cooler, calmer lands, where balm seems to come from the heavens with sundown, night wind and

dew or frost. For it is not simple warm blood that runs through the heart, but a liquid flame: the lovely Tahoser languished and swooned, although she inhaled perfumes and surrounded herself with flowers —she a flower herself—and drank of things that bring forgetfulness. Music wearied her, or else fed her love too much, developing her sense of pain, deepening her heartache and desire. She took no longer any pleasure in the dances of her slaves or friends; at night sleep would not come, or only came to fly again. Sighing, half suffocated, with heavy head and swollen throat, she would leave her splendid bed and stretch upon the marble floor, as though to drink in its calm and coolness.

The night that followed the triumphal entry of the Pharaoh, Tahoser deemed herself to be so unhappy, so incapable of

any desire to live, that she felt sure death itself would come of sheer sorrow if she did not make a supreme effort. She dressed very simply, and at the first light of day, without Nofre hearing, had herself taken over the river. Trembling, hand upon heart, she went towards the pavilion of Poëri.

It was now full day, and the gates opened to let out various vehicles and flocks going to pasturage. Tahoser entered, and upon the threshold met Poëri.

She bowed her head with a suppliant gesture, and perhaps looked far lovelier so than in the pomp and state of her richest robes and in her fine home. Her breast throbbed, and tears dropped upon the pale, soft cheeks.

"Enter," said Poëri. "Enter without any fear. This house offers you hospitality."

CHAPTER VI

TAHOSER, encouraged by the friendly phrase of Poëri, left her suppliant pose and rose up.

A warm colour came to her pale cheeks; some sense of shame came to her, accompanied by hope. She blushed now at the strange action that Love had made her do and now, upon the very threshold that she had often crossed in dream, she hesitated. Her passion held her, and stayed the words that strove to come. Before the reality her dreams were dumb.

The young man, believing that timidity, companion of misfortune, alone prevented Tahoser entering further into the house, said to her in a pleasant voice—

"Enter, young girl, and do not tremble so. The house is large enough to shelter

you. If you are weary, rest. If you hunger or thirst, my servants will bring you food."

The daughter of Petamounoph, encouraged by these words, entered the mansion, which she soon saw was furnished with the simple grace of a great country house.

Poëri seated himself, and Tahoser sat just before him. He rested upon her eyes that were full of kindly query.

Seated thus, she seemed quite ravishing. The gauze veil she had wrapped around her fell behind, discovering the rich masses of her hair and her sweet, sad face. Her sleeveless tunic showed the arms to the elbow, and left her freedom of gesture.

"I am Poëri," he said, "Intendant of Crown Property."

"I am Hora," said the girl, who had invented a fable. "My parents are dead

They left enough for their funeral only. I am alone, without help. But if you desire to aid me I can return your hospitality. I can sew and sing, dance and play the harp."

"Hora, be welcome at the house of Poëri," was the answer. "You can find here, without strain, for you seem delicate, an occupation suitable to a young girl who has known more prosperous times. There are among my servants some girls, pleasant and well-trained ones, whom you will like as companions. They will explain the order of life in my house. As the days fall by perhaps some good fortune may come to you. If not, stay here in peace. The guest the gods send is sacred."

Poëri now rose, as though to draw himself away from the grateful thanks of her falsely called Hora. She had fallen at his feet.

"Remain here now," said Poëri, "until I have a room set apart for you. I will send you refreshments."

He then left her, and Tahoser followed him with her eyes as far as she possibly could.

A servant appeared, and brought her food, fruit and water.

Tahoser was not very hungry, but tried to show appetite, and drank thirstily of the water.

The servant having left, she again assumed a contemplative pose. Hundreds of warring thoughts passed through the young, pretty head.

Sometimes, with the feeling that must come to a virgin, she repented the extreme step she had taken; sometimes, with the passion of one in love, she praised that step.

"I am beneath the roof of Poëri, and shall see him daily and hear his voice.

But he . . . he who did not notice me when I passed his house, finely dressed and jewelled, in my chariot, and surrounded with slaves, how is it possible that he would notice me now, a suppliant in common attire he has taken pity upon!"

She paused and gazed around, then her thoughts were resumed.

"That which my luxury did not impress, my misery surely cannot. Perhaps, after all, I am ugly, and Nofre is a flatterer when she says that on all the Nile's banks there is no one lovelier than her mistress. No; *I am beautiful.* Men's ardent eyes have said it thousands of times, and I have read it also in the disdain of women. Can Poëri love me, or come to love me? Any other man would have recognized me beneath any disguise."

These reflections abated the courage of Tahoser, then all at once she took heart

of grace, and saw that her beauty, her youth and her love must end by subduing the calm heart of Poëri. She would be so sweet, so attentive, so devoted, she would put so much of the coquette into her simple toilette, that he most certainly could not resist her for long. Then she would show him that the humble servant was of high rank, with slaves, lands, houses . . . and after—there would be a life of dream, splendid and radiant for ever.

"Let me first and before all appear beautiful to him," she said. She bathed her face, throat and shoulders, and decked herself with some lotus flowers. Then she awaited Poëri in the doorway of the pavilion. Tahoser contemplated with gentle joy the charming scene that met her eyes, and she reflected that it would be sweet indeed to be loved here

in this beautiful house, amidst the perfume of flowers.

Poëri reappeared to spend the heat of the day in his apartments. She advanced a few steps, but he bade her rest, saying—

"Hora, you have told me you can play. Take, then, that little harp and play me and sing some quaint old air, sweet, tender, and very slow in its measure. Sleep is full of fair dreams, that should be ministered to with music."

The daughter of the High Priest took the instrument and played, then she sang an old Egyptian air—some vague sigh of the older days, with a sweet, impressive theme.

"In truth, you have told me all that you could have done about yourself," said Poëri. "You know the sweet sounds as a skilled musician. Your face, too, does not seem the face I saw earlier: another

woman seems to appear behind that woman, dimly, as a light appears behind a veil. Who art thou? . . ."

"I am Hora," replied Tahoser untruthfully. "Have I not recounted my history? If I am poor, need I be hideous to look upon? But does it please you for me to continue to play and sing?"

"Yes; repeat that sweet air. It fascinates me and lulls. Repeat it, I beg of you, till sleep comes to me and rests my eyes."

Soon he slept. After a long contemplation, and gathering courage from his silence and desire from his beauty, Tahoser, pressing her hand to her heart, kissed his face. Then she drew up ashamed and with fear.

The sleeper had vaguely, in some strange state of mind between life and dream, felt the soft, warm lips of Tahoser. He

sighed and moved, and she heard him say: "*Ra'hel, O Ra'hel, best beloved Ra'hel.*" But the words were in the Hebrew language, which was utterly strange to the Egyptian girl. So she took up a fan of feathers and tenderly waved it to and fro over the loved sleeper, hoping and yet fearing that soon he would awaken and speak to her again.

CHAPTER VII

When day had fully come upon the morning of Tahoser's journey to Poëri, Nofre, who slept upon a little couch at the feet of her mistress, was surprised not to hear herself called by the clapping of hands, as was the usual custom. She raised herself, and saw that the couch of her mistress was empty. Tahoser rarely left her bed without the aid of her women to dress her and attend to the hair and give her perfumed water.

Nofre searched the porticoes, the gardens, the summer-houses, and then she took genuine alarm, and aroused the whole mansion. Tahoser was certainly not in the house. An old servant wisely had the idea of searching for footsteps in the sand of the paths that led away from the

mansion. A light depression belonging to a little foot was traced. At last the way by which Tahoser had actually left was placed beyond doubt. Then all clues were lost. The quay gave no trace. The boatman who had taken her had not returned; the other boatmen slept, and said they had not heard or seen anything. One only said that a woman, poorly clad and evidently of a low class, had gone at dawn to the other bank of the river towards the Memnonia quarter, doubtless to carry out some funeral rite. This did not at all seem to refer to the elegant Tahoser, and so threw Nofre and the older servant, Souhem, off the track of their beloved mistress. They entered the mansion again, sad and disappointed. The servants and various slaves were seated upon the ground in attitudes of the deepest desolation. With one hand upon the head and the

other raised upwards, they cried in a plaintive chorus—

"O ill fortune! The mistress of our house is lost to us!"

"By Oms, I swear I will find her," said the old servant Souhem, "even if I have to go to the furthest point of the land. She was a good mistress. We had abundant food, we were not overworked or overbeaten. Her little foot was not heavy upon our necks, and in her house the slave might think himself free."

"Ill fortune, ill fortune, ill fortune!" cried men and women, with lowered heads.

"Alas! O dearest Mistress, who can know where you are now?" said the faithful servant, his tears falling. "Perhaps a magician has drawn you from your palace by some spell. Perhaps you may not even again see the mummy of your father, the

High Priest Petamounoph, in the chamber of the dead that was hollowed for you!"

"Calm yourself, Nofre," said Souhem. "Let us not become creatures of despair too soon. It may be that Tahoser will return to us soon. She has given way to some fancy of the mind that is unknown to us, and soon we shall see her return gay and smiling, with flowers in her hands."

Wiping her eyes Nofre agreed, and hoped that it might be so. Souhem seated himself, and holding his temples in his hands, appeared to reflect deeply. His face of reddish-brown, deep-set eyes and high cheekbones gave him an odd and grotesque appearance. However, the result of his meditations, so anxiously awaited by Nofre, was this—

"Nofre, the daughter of Petamounoph, is seized with a love passion.'

"Who has told you?" asked Nofre, who believed that she alone could read the heart of her mistress.

"No one. But Tahoser is very beautiful. She has seen the yearly rise and fall of the Nile sixteen times, and sixteen is the emblematic number of Pleasure. Many times of late she has called her musicians at strange hours, as though to calm her troubled heart."

"You speak well, and wisdom lives in your aged head. But how have you learnt anything soever of women; you who have watered the garden and carried things from place to place only?"

The old slave smiled, as though to indicate that he had not always been old and a captive.

Her mind lit up by the suggestion of Souhem, Nofre thought at once of the handsome Ahmosis, officer of Pharaoh.

As she loved him herself, she thought her mistress might also.

She dressed herself suitably and went to the abode of the officer, thinking that there she would undoubtedly find the beloved Tahoser.

The young officer, when he saw Nofre, whom he knew well, made a quick gesture of greeting, and felt pleased. He thought Nofre might be bringing some message from Tahoser, although she had never given him responsive glances. But the man to whom the gods havegiven masculine beauty can easily imagine that all women worship him. He rose from his seat and went towards Nofre, whose unquiet glance was turning to every part of the room.

"What leads you here, Nofre?" said Ahmosis, seeing that the young attendant, preoccupied, did not break the silence.

"Your mistress is well, I hope? Surely I saw her at the entry of Pharaoh?"

"If my mistress is well you should know it as well as any in Egypt," responded Nofre. "For she has fled without a word, and the shelter she has chosen I would have sworn by Hathor you knew of."

"She has gone . . . fled from her house, do you say?" cried Ahmosis in unfeigned astonishment.

"I believed that she loved you," said Nofre. "Often girls have sudden fancies, and no matter how well trained and cared for they are, or how great and rich, their heads can soon be turned. But she is not here, then?"

"The gods, who know all and see all, can alone know where she is. She has not been here. But look, if you will; visit all the rooms of this house."

"I believe thee, Ahmosis; and now I

will withdraw. If Tahoser were here you would not need to conceal from her faithful Nofre, who would ask no better fate on earth than to help and aid her dear mistress in her love or any other affairs."

Nofre now returned to the mansion more disturbed than ever. She feared that there might be a chance of some of the slaves being the cause of Tahoser's death even. Perhaps she had been killed for the sake of her rich jewels! . . .

All this time the Pharaoh himself was thinking of the beautiful Tahoser, brooding deeply. After having made the libations and offerings desired by established ritual, he seated himself in the outer court of the harem, and dreamed a dream that he longed to come true. In the basin of a big fountain some nude, flower-crowned girls tried to distract him by their gambols, for Pharaoh since his return had not

made choice of any one of them to be the queen of his passions for the time being.

It was a charming picture that the pretty girls made, their slender but rounded bodies shining with the clear water that was placed in the midst of a court surrounded, by painted columns. The whole scene, too, was lit by the soft, pure light that came from a sky of azure.

The favourites, Amensé and Twéa, wearied of swimming, came out of the water, and kneeling at the edge of the fountain, spread forth their hair to the sun to dry it. But Pharaoh did not regard anything that happened. Upon this day he was not in the mood to be amused. He quitted them all and directed his steps towards his granite-built apartments. Each of these chambers was formed of blocks of prodigious size, and closed by doors of stone that scarce any human

power could open without knowledge of a secret. In these chambers were safely kept the riches of Pharaoh, and the loot he had taken from conquered peoples.

There were ingots of precious metals and crowns of gold and silver; breast-plates and bracelets of rare enamels, ear-rings, necklaces of gems, anklets and girdles; vases, coffers, boxes of precious woods, stuffs such as silk, ostrich plumes, elephant tusks, vessels of gold and other fine metals, and statuettes by the greatest sculptors of the age.

In each chamber the Pharaoh selected rich presents, and these were heaped upon a litter borne by two robust slaves. Then Timopht was called, the man who had followed Tahoser. To him was confided the litter of rich presents, with the command: "Have these carried to the house of Tahoser, daughter of the High Priest

Petamounoph. Say they are sent by Pharaoh."

Timopht placed himself at the head of the *cortège*, and they crossed the Nile in a royal barge. Soon the house of Tahoser was reached, and the royal command given. At the sight of the treasure Nofre felt a swooning feeling come over her, which she restrained with great difficulty. Fear and surprise were mixed and mingled in her mind. Perhaps fear was uppermost, for when the King learned, as he soon must, that Tahoser had gone and none had seen her flight, might he not deal out death as generously as he now dealt out his great gifts? . . .

"Tahoser has gone from here—has left her house, and I swear that I do not know where she is!" was the trembling reply of Nofre to the messenger.

"Pharaoh, favoured of Amon-Ra, has

sent these presents. I cannot take them back to the royal palace. Guard them until Tahoser returns or is found. You will answer to me for them with your life. Lock these gifts in some chamber guarded by faithful servants." So replied the royal servant. But when he had returned to the palace, and, prostrate before the King, had told all his story, Pharaoh became deeply enraged, and struck so violently with his sceptre against the stone upon which he stood that the stone split.

CHAPTER VIII

TAHOSER, one must say, thought scarcely at all of Nofre, her favourite, nor of the anxiety the absence would cause. The beloved mistress had, as though by some stroke, forgot her fine house at Thebes, her servants, her dresses and jewels even —though this last is difficult to believe of a woman. The daughter of Petamounoph knew not at all of the love of Pharaoh for her. *She* had not seen the look charged with desire that fell upon her from the eyes of such majesty that few things on earth could interest.

She now sat spinning in the house of Poëri—he had given her that task—and following with glances all the movements of her new master—glances that were really caresses. She enjoyed in silence the

happiness of simply being near him. If Poëri had steadily looked at her, he would have been struck without doubt by the humid light of her eyes, her sudden blushes, and the quickened rising and falling of her bosom. But he was seated at a table writing. Did Poëri understand the love Tahoser so certainly held for him? If so, for some hidden reason did he conceal his discovery? His attitude towards her was pleasant but reserved. He did not wish to invite any confidences—that was apparent.

Nevertheless, the false Hora was very lovely. Her charms, set off by the poverty and simplicity of her garb, seemed heightened. A richer attire would have perhaps drawn the eye away from the beauty of her face and form. At the hottest hours of the day, when a luminous heat quivered over the parched land, an

aura of amorousness seemed to be around her. Upon the pretty, half-parted lips her love words trembled like birds eager to fly. Low and softly, that none could hear, she said—

"Poëri, how I love thee."

It was now harvest-time, and Poëri went to make one of his inspections of the work to be done. She followed timidly, but Poëri said—

"Sorrow and sadness may find solace in the peaceful works the land requires. Come, then; turn your spindle in the shade of this tree."

Tahoser meekly obeyed, and watched the labour of harvesting. After some time he whom she so loved rejoined her, saying—

"Ah well, Hora, has the sight of all this interested you? These are the pleasures of air and the fields. We have not here

as at Thebes yonder, harp-players and dancers and the pleasures of the city. But now go and take a repast with the others. I have certain accounts to prepare."

Tahoser bowed and left him. In the big room where the meals were served to the people of Paëri's domain there was chatter, banter and the usual touches of scandal.

"Where does the master go each night?" said a little girl, with malice.

"The master goes where he wills," was one reply from a big slave-girl. "Should he render any account to you? It is not you, that is certain, who influences any of his actions."

"Why not I as well as any other here?"

The big slave shrugged. "Hora herself, though whiter, lovelier than all of us, does not even sway him. Though he bears an Egyptian name and is in

Pharaoh's service, he is of the race of Israel. When he goes from home at night doubtless it is to assist at their sacrifices."

Tahoser stole away. Two hours later Poëri left the mansion, and silently as a shadow she followed him.

CHAPTER IX

TAHOSER followed Poëri because a feeling of burning jealousy possessed her. She had not believed for a moment that the young Hebrew master left his house every night to assist at some rite or ceremony. She thought that a woman must be the motive of any nightly visits of his, and she wished to know who was her rival. The cool good-will of Poëri towards her, a beautiful girl, showed that his heart was full of another. How could he possibly rest calm before her, famed for her beauty in all Thebes? Could he not be influenced by a girl who had troubled the dreams of the King's officers, of savants, priests even, and some princes of the royal race? It seemed to be a strange, mysterious thing. Yet was it not also a fact?

Poëri reached the bank of the river and entered a frail little boat. Tahoser dropped into the water and swam after the boat. She thought: "What matters it if the crocodiles kill me? Poëri does not love me!"

The danger from the beasts was very real, and, in particular, at night. During the day the perpetual movement of boats, the work on the quays, the noise of the town, kept the crocodiles away. They sunned themselves on banks afar off. But night and shade made them bolder. Tahoser had not thought of them. Passion does not often calculate the dangers in its path. But now that the peril faced her she braved it—she so timid once. All at once the boat stopped, though the other shore was yet some distance away. Poëri, ceasing his labour with the paddle, looked around with anxiety. He had seen the

white spot upon the water caused by the robe of Tahoser.

Thinking she was lost, the daring young swimmer dived bravely.

"I would have vowed that some one followed," thought Poëri, but he began rowing once more. Who would risk themselves in the Nile at night? What he had taken for a head must have been a lotus or perchance a patch of foam. . . . When Tahoser breathed deep again the little bark had again taken its confident way.

Poëri managed the oar, or paddle, with the calm, certain ease that one sees in figures upon the bas-reliefs. The shadows of the great North Palace now protected Tahoser.

Poëri now disembarked, and Tahoser, cramped, painfully followed him. She made an appeal to her energy, and keep-

ing the young Hebrew in sight, turned the angle of the palace and plunged through the streets of Thebes.

At the end of a quarter of an hour of walking, the palaces, temples and rich mansions were all left behind, and habitations much more humble came in sight. The neighbourhood began to look sinister.

"Could they have spoken true?" she thought. "Does Poëri come here to sacrifice to barbarian gods? Surely this place seems suited for cruel rites and the acting of some awful ritual."

Finally Poëri penetrated to the inside of a hut made of earth. Through some cracks there came feeble gleams of a yellow light. A little lamp lit the room, which looked better than its outside would lead one to expect. This Tahoser noticed—and more—through a little opening in the wall. Upon a sort of couch or divan was seated

a woman of some foreign race: a woman wonderfully beautiful. She was more white than any child of Egypt—white as milk, as the lily. Her eyebrows were arcs of ebony. Their points met above a small aquiline nose. Her eyes were bright and languid by turns, her lips two red bands that opened upon pearly teeth. Her abundant hair was black and lustrous, with curls at each ear. Around the full white throat was a golden necklace.

Her clothing was very singular. It consisted of a sort of large tunic, embroidered with designs of many colours. It fell from the shoulders to the knees, and left the arms nude and free. Poëri sat near her and talked, but Tahoser could not understand what the words were; but she understood or divined the sense far too well for her peace of mind.

Yet hope dies hard in the heart that loves.

"Perhaps she is his sister," said Tahoser. "He comes to see her in secret, not wishing any one to know that they are of a race that has been reduced to servitude."

She heard with a sad intensity all the harmonious words and cadences, of which each syllable contained a secret she would have given years of life to learn. They sounded vague, murmurous, like the wind in the trees or sweeping over the waters of a river.

"O Ra'hel! My well-beloved Ra'hel!" Poëri often said.

Tahoser caught this name, and then remembered she had heard it in his house, muttered by him when she had sung and fanned his slumbers.

"He thinks of her in dreams. Ra'hel is her name, I do not doubt." And the poor child suffered deeply.

Ra'hel inclined her head upon the

shoulder of Poëri. It was like a flower heavily laden with perfume. He kissed her hair, and she turned to him with heavy, half-closed eyes, giving him her lips. Their hands sought each other's and joined. . . .

"Any awful ritual of his faith would have terrified me less than this," thought the unhappy eavesdropper.

Overcome by emotion and sorrow, Tahoser fell to the earth in the shadow cast by the wall of the hut. Twice she attempted to rise to her feet, but fell again. A cloud moved before her eyes, obscuring all. The wearied limbs failed utterly, and she rolled upon the ground unconscious.

* * * * *

In the meanwhile Poëri left the hut, after giving to Ra'hel a last lingering kiss.

CHAPTER X

PHARAOH, restless and furious at the loss of Tahoser, had yielded to the need for change of place that comes to hearts tormented with a passion that they cannot allay. To the great chagrin of the favourites, Amensé, Hont-Reché and Twéa, who tried to retain His Majesty at the Summer Pavilion by every artifice in their power, he decided to go and dwell for a time in the North Palace upon the other bank of the Nile. His preoccupation was of that morose kind that does not invite or want the babble of silly women's tongues. All that did not relate to Tahoser displeased him. He now thought actually ugly the beauties who of yore had seemed to him so delightful. Their

young, gracious bodies and voluptuous poses, their long eyes shining with desires, their purple mouths and softly-glowing white teeth: everything about them, even to the heady perfumes that came from their skins—skins like flowers sprinkled with dew—these things had become hideous, intolerable. He could not comprehend how he had even pretended to love charms that now seemed vulgar. When Twéa placed her rosy hand upon him, trembling with emotion, as though to give rebirth to an old familiarity; when Hont-Reché tried to engage him in chess, or Amensé offered him a lovely lotus flower with respectful and suppliant grace, he felt as though he could strike them, and did not spare his disdainful looks.

The unhappy women who had risked all such little overtures retired silent and tearful. They rested silent against the

painted walls: silent as were the figures of the frescoes.

To avoid such scenes of tears he retired to the other palace alone, taciturn. And there, instead of sitting upon his throne in the attitude of kings and gods, motionless, he paced feverishly through the immense salons. It was a strange spectacle to see Pharaoh, great in stature, formidable to look at as a granite colossus, pacing ever to and fro, as though he wished to strike the stones with his feet and shatter them beneath his might. As he passed his terrified guards stood like statues, hardly daring to breathe. When he was afar off they said—

"What can ail the Pharaoh? Had he returned vanquished from his expedition he could not be more morose or more sombre."

If, in place of ten victories (slaying

twenty thousand), two thousand fair virgin captives, vast treasure of gold powder ebony, ivory, and rare animals and productions, Pharaoh had seen his army cut to pieces, his chariots thrown, himself in full flight beneath hundreds of arrows, he could not have looked more sad, more desperate. . . . For the land of Egypt had tens of thousands of soldiers, and horses innumerable; workers in wood and all metals; workers of weapons. A disaster, did it come, would soon be repaired by Pharaoh with all his hosts. *But*, to have wished for a thing that he could not get at once, to have encountered an obstacle to his will and pleasure, to have lanced like a javelin some desire that did not attain its goal! . . .

For an instant, he, the great Pharaoh, had the fleeting idea that he was not a god and king, but merely a man. Tired

of pacing through his forest of granite, he flung himself upon a couch and had Timopht called. This man appeared, prostrating himself at every few paces. He had doubts as to the anger or pleasure of his august master. But his greatest doubt was this: Would the skill he showed in tracing the home of Tahoser save him from failing to now trace Tahoser herself? He raised his hands and called upon the mercy of the King.

"O King, do not cause me death, nor have me beaten terribly; the beautiful Tahoser, daughter of Petamounoph, upon whom your desire has deigned to descend, will be found without doubt, and when she returns to her father's house and sees the magnificent presents her heart will be touched, and of her own desire she will come to thee, taking the place you assign her among the women."

"Have you questioned the servants and the slaves?" said Pharaoh. "The rod will untie tongues of the most silent type, and suffering will cause them to speak what they would hide."

"Nofre and Souhem, her favourite and old follower, think she fled by the garden. That gate gives upon the Nile, and water holds no tracks."

"What say the boatmen of the Nile?"

"They have seen nothing but one poor woman in flight. This could not be the beauteous and rich Tahoser, who carries herself as a queen garbed in splendid robes."

The reasoning of Timopht did not appear to convince Pharaoh. He reflected and muttered to himself, whilst poor Timopht waited in silence, fearing an explosion of anger. The King's lips moved.

"That humble attire . . . a disguise.

Yes, that is it. And thus attired she passed to the other bank of the river. This Timopht is an imbecile without the least penetration. I am tempted to throw him to the crocodiles. But for what motive can a virgin of high birth wish to flee her palace alone and without a word to any one? *Can there be love at the bottom of the mystery?*"

At such an idea the face of Pharaoh became purple with impotent anger, then paled. His teeth ground together, and the whole aspect of his face was so terrible that Timopht fell to the earth before him as though dead. But Pharaoh calmed himself. His face took on again its majestic aspect, wearied but placid. Seeing that Timopht did not rise, he pushed him disdainfully with his foot.

Timopht remained a prey to the most poignant anguish.

"Come, arise, Timopht," said the King. "Arise and run, hasten. Send messengers out on every side. Search temples, palaces, houses, villas, gardens, even every humble cabin. *Find Takoser.* Vehicles are to go on all the ways in search. Boats are to search the Nile. Go yourself, too, and question all. Search for her as Isis sought for Osiris. Bring her here alive or dead, or you shall perish in fearful agony."

Timopht this time rushed forth with the speed of an ibex to give fullest power to the orders of Pharaoh, who now became more serene. Soon the heavy thunder of chariots woke every echo in the vast palace. Forth they dashed at a gallop in every possible direction. The roads were thick with them. Everywhere was heard the crack of whips, the oaths of drivers, and the perpetual rolling of wheels.

Soon the Pharaoh could see from a

terrace the vessels striking through the water under the efforts of the rowers, and messengers going hot-foot upon the other bank towards the country. The Libyan chain, with its rose lights and sapphire shadows, shut in the view, and served as a background to the gigantic constructions of Rhamses, Amenoph and Menephta. The pylon towers, with sloping sides, the walls, the seated colossi, all stood out gilt by the sun's rays. Distance could not take away their size or grandeur. But it was not these proud edifices that Pharaoh regarded: among the palms and fields, houses, kiosks—there, somewhere, hid Tahoser without doubt. Under some roof in shade or sun she would be resting or taking refuge. He longed to make all places quite transparent. Then she *must* be discovered.

The hours fell by as drearily as they

ever must when there is one who waits and longs, and one who does not come and cannot hear. Already the sun had disappeared behind the mountains, lancing its last lines of flame at Thebes. The messengers had not yet returned, but Pharaoh guarded his motionless attitude. The night spread over the city, calm, fresh and blue; the stars shone in the sky and again in the Nile, shone and scintillated their pallid, golden light, making the heavens more blue, the waters more profound. And upon a corner of the terrace of his palace stood the Pharaoh, silent, impassible, outlining himself against the wall behind like a statue of basalt. Sweeping over with his eyes this great city of which he was the absolute master, he reflected sadly upon the limits of human power and influence.

"All those houses hold beings who

curve in the dust before my face. To them my orders are as the orders of the gods. When I pass in a golden litter borne by my officers, the virgins feel that their breasts throb as they follow my way with long, timid glances. The priests burn incense before me, the people hold aloft the nodding palm or feather to cool the air about me. The hurtling of my arrows make nations tremble, and the walls of the pylons, huge as hills, are yet not huge enough to hold the inscriptions of my victories. The quarries are worked out in the effort to supply stone enough for vast images of myself. All this, and yet . . . yet when I form a wish, one wish only, in my superb satiety, that wish cannot receive the crown of success. Timopht comes not. He has found nothing, nothing. O Tahoser, Tahoser, indeed you owe me happiness for this fearful waiting!"

Meanwhile, the various messengers, Timopht in command, visited houses, palaces, every sort of place on all the roads they could. They questioned and bullied and searched. Her name and style were told to all. She was closely described, yet none could be found who would admit that they had recently seen her; no reply came that had any help or any hope for the wearied, anxious searchers.

The first messenger at last arrived, and came to the terrace. He lowly announced that Tahoser could not be found. The Pharaoh struck out at the man with his heavy sceptre, and the messenger rolled over. He was dead. A second messenger now arrived, and making his way to the terrace, he stumbled over the dead body of his comrade. Fear and trembling came upon him. He saw that Pharaoh was deeply angered.

"And Tahoser?" questioned the King, without moving from his statuesque attitude.

"O Majesty, trace of her is utterly lost!" replied the unhappy one, kneeling in the shadow at the royal feet.

The arm rushed down again and again, the heavy sceptre crashed into the skull of a servant who had tried—but failed.

The third man to arrive suffered the same fearsome blow.

From house to house Timopht himself at last arrived at the pavilion of Poëri, who, returned from his nocturnal journey, was astonished in the morning not to see anything of the so-called Hora. Harphré, and all the servants who had supped with her the night before, knew not what could have become of her. Her chamber was empty, and they searched vainly in the gardens, store-rooms and other places.

To the questions of the anxious Timopht, Poëri told all that he knew of the coming of Tahoser and of her flight, or disappearance. The true account was told with all its details. As to what road she had taken none knew. Without doubt, rested and refreshed at the pavilion, she had continued a journey she had planned towards a goal that could not even be guessed.

"She was," said Poëri, in continuation, "a fair woman, sad in manner and garbed in the simplest stuffs. She seemed poor, and gave Hora as her name." He now learned for the first time that Hora was in reality Tahoser. . . .

Equipped with all this news, Timopht returned in hot haste to the palace and recounted all to the King.

"What went she forth to do at the house of Poëri?"

Then he added—

"If, indeed, Hora was Tahoser, she must have loved Poëri. Yet, again, it might not be so; for would she flee in such fashion from the roof of one she loved? Ah! I, Pharaoh, will have her found, if I have to overturn the whole of the land of Egypt."

CHAPTER XI

RA'HEL, who from the threshold of her little cabin, or cottage, gazed after Poëri, thought that she heard a feeble sigh. She listened intently.

Dogs bayed the moon, and there could be heard from the river bank the curious cry or noise of the crocodiles. The young Israelite was about to re-enter when a moaning noise, more distinct this time, made her pause. She decided that it was not one of the usual noises of the night, but was a sound that came from a human throat, probably from one in pain or trouble. She approached the spot where the sound appeared to come from, but, fearing some trap or ambush, she went warily. Near the wall of the cabin, in the bluish shadows, she saw a form lying upon the earth. It

was Hora, and the curves and roundness of the robe showed her sex.

Ra'hel, seeing that she only had to deal with a woman who had fallen or swooned, lost what fear she had, and, kneeling by the side of the sweet, quivering form, tried the breathing and the beating of the heart. She found pale lips and a heart that hardly throbbed. Feeling the water in the robe of the girl, Ra'hel at first dreaded that it was blood—and murder. She called Thamar, her servant, and somehow they managed to carry the wet, faint form into the cabin. Then the two women laid her upon a bed. Thamar held a lamp aloft, whilst Ra'hel bent over the young girl and sought for a wound, but could not find one. They took off her wet garments, and put a woollen one upon her that was much warmer.

Tahoser now slowly opened her eyes and gazed around her with fear, much like a gazelle at bay fearing the hunter or the hound. It took some minutes for her to bring together in her mind the tangled threads of life when she last really lived it. Ideas had gone; there was a gap or blank. She could not comprehend yet how she came to be in that room, on that bed. A little while ago she had seen Poëri and Ra'hel sitting side by side, fingers interlaced, talking or making love, whilst she regarded them dismayed.

Soon memory fully returned, and with it the whole aspect of affairs. The light now gave her in full detail the fine face and figure of Ra'hel.

Tahoser, resting and the pressing distress lifted from her mind, studied her, somewhat depressed to find her of such regular beauty. Utterly in vain did she

try to find some fault, although, of course, she sought with the usual feminine and bitter jealousy. She did not really feel surpassed, but certainly did feel equalled. Ra'hel was the ideal Israelite: Tahoser was the ideal Egyptian. That was the whole truth of the two personalities as far as their outer charms were concerned.

Hard though it was for a loving heart, Tahoser was compelled to admit that the passion of Poëri was given to a worthy object. He had not been in error. Such eyes and brows, nobly-cut, proud nose, and red, smiling mouth, must succeed in pleasing. And so also the whole of the oval of face and rounded throat and breasts. Even her attire, exotic and bizarre though it was, seemed to thoroughly suit her and heighten the charm.

"I committed a great fault," said Tahoser to herself, "when I presented myself

to Poëri under the disguise of a suppliant, poor and humble-looking, trusting to the over-vaunted charms that flatterers were for ever talking of. Senseless one! It is as though a warrior went out to conquer and did not take his shield and spear. Ah, had I gone to him armed with luxury, covered with jewels, gems and enamels, erect in my golden chariot, followed by a crowd of my slaves, I should then have held him, it may be, by vanity, if not by love for myself! I have been in error. I risked my stake, and I have lost!"

"How art thou now?" she heard Ra'hel saying in Egyptian, for she could tell that her guest was not an Israelite. The voice was pleasant and winning, the strange accent gave it a kind of grace.

Tahoser was touched at heart in spite of herself, and replied slowly—

"I am a little better; your care has almost cured me."

"Do not weary yourself with talking," responded the Israelite, laying her fingers on Tahoser's lips. "Try to sleep and regain your lost strength. Thamar and I will watch over your rest."

The many emotions, the crossing of the Nile, the long walk through the poorer part of Thebes, had wearied out the body and almost the spirit of the brave daughter of Petamounoph. Her delicately-nurtured body was beaten into submission, and soon the long-lashed lids were closed into sweet, dark semicircles. There was a touch of fever in the cheeks. Sleep came as sleep must come, but it was agitated, inquiet, shot through and through with grotesque dreams and menacing hallucinations. She shivered, and broken words and sentences left her lips. In

dream she answered dream questions with half-opened lips.

Ra'hel and Thamar watched every movement of the fevered sleeper, but Thamar did so with feelings that were not so kindly as those of her mistress. Whence came this strange beauty, and why? Thamar wondered, and she found no answer that satisfied. Ra'hel kept silence, but Thamar spoke.

"Mistress, I predict no good will come of this woman's visit."

"Why, Thamar?"

"It is strange she should faint just there by our door."

"She fell just where her illness overtook her. That is all."

The older woman shook her head in doubt.

"Do you not believe the faint to be real? The weary glance, pale lips and cheeks,

the inert limbs, and skin cold as a corpse . . . can all such things be unreal?"

"No," replied Thamar, "though such things *can* be feigned. I believe she lost her senses for a time."

"Then why your suspicions?

"How came she there in the middle of the night in this far-off quarter, inhabited only by poor captives of our people, that the cruel Pharaoh employs for the making of bricks? . . . What motive could possibly lead this young Egyptian woman near our poor cabins? Why were her clothes soaked with water, as though she had come out of a fountain or out of the river? Such are the things that I cannot understand about this strange visitor!"

"I am as ignorant as you are of all these things," gently replied Ra'hel.

"If she should be a spy in the service of our masters. Great things are on the

way, and even now we may have been betrayed," persisted Thamar.

"How can this young girl, ill and isolated as she now is, hurt us at all? Her fate is in our hands. At the least sign of any treachery we could keep her a prisoner."

"Oh, understand, Ra'hel," answered Thamar. "This woman does not belong to the class she pretends to. Look at her beautifully-tended hands. Her poverty or poor attire is a disguise."

At last the words and looks of Thamar made an impression upon Ra'hel, and she looked much more closely at her unusual guest, studying her again in the flickering light of the lamp.

She examined the hands, arms and face of Tahoser, and saw how beautiful the young Egyptian was, although this fact did not in any way embitter the kindly

Ra'hel. She could not believe that so much sweetness, such perfection, hid an abject soul capable of perfidy. In this the young, candid spirit of the Israelite judged better than the old, experienced head of her follower.

Day came, and with it an increase of fever in the sick one. She had moments of delirium, followed by heavy sleep.

"Should she die here we may be accused of her death," murmured Thamar.

"She will not die," calmly said her mistress.

"I could throw the dead body in the Nile," said the obstinate Thamar. "The crocodiles would consume it."

At night Poëri came and recognized Hora. A great astonishment fell upon Poëri, for he could not conceive how ever Tahoser came to such a place. His surprise struck Ra'hel to the heart. She

placed herself before Poëri, to read the truth in his eyes, and said—

"You know her, then?

"Yes," was the simple reply.

The eyes of the servant Thamar shone with satisfaction. Her judgment was being justified. But Ra'hel looked serene. She was sure of her lover.

Then Poëri told all, right up to the story of the royal search.

"I was right in my fears, mistress mine," said Thamar, "for Hora and Tahoser are the same person."

"It is possible," said Poëri. "But there are still mysteries that my reason cannot explain . . . why Tahoser was in disguise, and how she got here."

"She followed you, I do not doubt," replied Ra'hel.

Finally, by discussion, they decided how Tahoser got to the Israelite's home,

putting the story together piece by piece.

"Things doubtless happened as we guess," said Poëri. "I can see the actions, but cannot comprehend the motives."

"I will explain them to you," said Ra'hel, smiling at him. "Hora, or rather Tahoser, took on this disguise and got into your house to live near you. Jealous, she followed you, as we have seen. She loves you. You are handsome, strong and kind. However, it does not affect me. *I* am not jealous, since you do not love her. Do you understand more fully now?"

Some blood mounted to the face of Poëri. He feared that Ra'hel was irritated, and was testing his love in some way. But the looks that Ra'hel caressed him with, so candid, luminous and pure, showed him that there was no after-thought in her mind, no subterfuge. She did not,

of course, want Tahoser to love her heart's desire, Poëri. The passion of Ra'hel for him should, and did, suffice him.

And now through the images of dream Tahoser saw Poëri standing by her side. A great joy flushed her face. Lifting herself a little, she seized his hand and carried it to her lips.

"Her lips burn," merely said Poëri.

"They burn with love quite as much as with fever," said Ra'hel. "But she is really ill. Shall Thamar go and search for Mosché? He is wiser than the so-called sages and diviners of Pharaoh. He can do all that they can, certainly. He knows plant-lore and all herbs. He can cure Tahoser. I am not cruel enough to wish that she would not recover."

So Thamar departed, and returned with a tall greybeard with burning eyes. He had the air of a prophet or seer. Certain

things were told him by Poëri, and he sat by the couch on which Tahoser was, and stretching forth his hands over her, he said—

"In the name of Him who can do all things, and compared with whom other gods are as idols or demons, though you do not belong to the chosen race of the Lord, young girl, *Be Thou Cured!*"

CHAPTER XII

THE old man retired with a solemn step, leaving behind him a hush of expectancy. Tahoser, surprised to find herself abandoned by the illness that had tortured her, looked around the room, and soon, draping herself with the clothing lent her, she got up and sat upon the bed. The fatigue and the fever had gone completely! She felt fresh as though she had had long repose, and her beauty shone forth in all its clarity and purity. Throwing back with her little hands the masses of hair that strayed around her temples, she stood erect, as though she wished Poëri to notice her. But seeing that he rested motionless near Ra'hel, without encouraging her by look or sign, she went towards the young Israelite and threw her arms around the

girl's throat. She stayed thus, her head hid in the breast of Ra'hel, and in silence tears fell. Then some sobs broke forth, and she clung, shaking, to her rival. This entire *abandon* and desolation touched the heart of Ra'hel; Tahoser seemed to avow herself beaten, and to implore pity and consideration by her pathetic, mute supplications. She made appeal to the generosity of her rival.

Ra'hel, softened, held her and said—

"Wipe away your tears and do not be desolate. You love Poëri. Good, you shall love him. I will not be jealous. Jacob, a patriarch of our race, had two wives, and they lived happy together."

Tahoser knelt at the feet of Ra'hel and kissed her hand, but Ra'hel raised her, and in a most sisterly way put her arm around Tahoser to support her.

It was a charming group, formed by two women of different races and types—both beautiful. Tahoser, elegant, gracious and with fine lines, like a sweet, overgrown child; Ra'hel, striking, strong and superb in her early maturity.

"Tahoser . . . you *are* Tahoser?" said Poëri.

She bowed her "Yes."

"How is it that you who live at Thebes in a rich palace, with slaves and all else, have chosen to love one of a race reduced to servitude, slavery; a man too who is a stranger to you, and not of your faith—a man from whom you are parted by a great distance?"

Ra'hel and Tahoser both smiled. The heart loves where it wishes. It cannot be coerced.

"Though I have the favour of Pharaoh, I am not equal to you. In Egypt's eyes I

am a slave, and you belong to the priestly caste, the highest and the most venerated. If you love me, and I do not say I doubt it, you would have to renounce your rank —could we be married?"

Tahoser now answered Poëri.

"Have I not already been a servant at your house?"

"You must renounce your country and follow me into strange lands across the desert, where the sun burns and the hot winds blow and shifting sands obscure the roads. There we shall find no tree or pleasant fountain. The road is strewn with the bones of those who have gone before, and failed."

"I will go," calmly said Tahoser.

"But there is yet more to say. Thy gods are not my gods. Jehovah, my God, has said that we must not adore stone, wood or metal. One God alone, infinite,

eternal, and without form or colour, is sufficient to fill that high space you Egyptians now people with a host of phantoms. Our God created us: you have created your gods yourselves."

Tahoser recoiled with misgiving. . . . Could she renounce her faith? And so she asked Poëri to explain his God. She would try to understand.

"That sounds well," said Poëri. "You shall be my wife. While you wait remain here, for the Pharaoh, who now has a passion for you, is causing a search to be made. You will not be discovered under this humble roof, and in a few days we shall be beyond his power. But the night creeps on. I must be gone."

He then left, and the two women slept together hand in hand upon the narrow little bed.

Thamar, who, during the whole of the

scene that had recently taken place in the cabin, had held herself pressed close into a corner, now rose and listened to the breathing of the two sisters. Convinced that their sleep was sound, she quietly groped her way to the door, and then with rapid steps made her way in the direction of the Nile.

She soon cleared and was free from the danger spots and desert places where robbers lurked at times, and got to the more opulent quarters of Thebes: three or four streets edged with high buildings, their shadows projecting far. The outer part of the royal palace was reached at last, and here was her present goal. But how to enter? Who would admit an aged Israelite at that hour of the night, white with the dust of the roads and poorly dressed? Some sentinels stopped her roughly and struck her roughly with their

javelins, but finally they asked her what it was she wanted.

"I wish to see Pharaoh."

They shook with mirth, but she was bitterly persistent.

"I wish to see Pharaoh. Take me to him at once."

"The moment is well chosen! Pharaoh has killed three messengers, and he is now upon a part of the terrace, standing as terrible as Typhon, God of Evil," one soldier deigned to say in explanation, or perhaps to get rid of the woman. She tried to force her way, but they struck her again and again. Her awful cries brought an officer. She shrieked at him—

"I wish to be taken before the Pharaoh; take me to Pharaoh!"

"It is utterly impossible," said the officer of the guard. "It would be impossible even if you were one of the highest people

of the kingdom, much less a miserable-looking person—such as you are."

"*I know where Tahoser is!*" The old woman gave stress to every syllable.

The officer, upon hearing these words, started as though he had been struck or stabbed. He then at once took Thamar by the hand and found Timopht, who took her into the presence of the Pharaoh. She fell before him, crying—

"O mighty Pharaoh, I have good news. Be merciful to me."

"Speak without fear," came the reply. Pharaoh had calmed, and would now listen to news.

"I know of the present hiding-place of that Tahoser for whom your messengers have sought throughout all Thebes."

At the beloved name of Tahoser, Pharaoh startled into fuller life, and advanced with sharp steps to the kneeling figure.

"If you are now telling me the truth you may take from my treasure-chambers all that you can carry away of gold or any precious things."

"I will deliver her into thy hands, O Pharaoh; let your spirit be tranquil. I can do this thing." She laughed harshly.

What motive had pressed Thamar forward into this betrayal? She wished to prevent a union she hated. She hated the Egyptians blindly, madly and unthinkingly. Could she break the heart of Tahoser she would laugh indeed. For once that beautiful girl was in Pharaoh's hands she could never escape, never again be the rival of Ra'hel. The palace knew well how to guard its prey.

"Where is she?" cried Pharaoh. "It is my wish to see her at once."

"Majesty, I alone can guide you there. I know the route and the by-ways of the

wretched parts where the most humble of thy servants wend their way. *Tahoser is there in a poor hut.*"

"Good," came the gracious answer. "Timopht, have a chariot ready. Woman, I place trust in your words."

The chariot came, and Pharaoh was conducted to it, followed by the Israelite woman. He strode into the chariot in kingly fashion, and seeing his guide draw back, commanded her to come also, and they dashed forwards.

The aged woman, bent and crouching in the chariot by the side of the great Pharaoh, made a strange sight—but the stars only saw it.

"Now, is this the road?" questioned the royal driver.

"Yes," was the reply.

The horses were lashed again and again, and they leapt forward as though their

burden was of no weight. The wheels of the chariot struck the stones, and they rang as though they were brass.

* * * * *

During all this time Tahoser slept by the side of Ra'hel, and dreamt a most curious dream. It was as follows—

The ancient gods of Egypt were before her eyes, and the High Priest Petamounoph also, who said to his daughter: "Ask them if they are gods." She did, and they replied they were not the true God. Then Poëri came. He led her towards a light so blinding that by its side the sun would be but a dark shadow. In the midst of the light there was a triangle of unknown words. . . .

That was the dream. And the car of Pharaoh still flashed forward.

"I beg of you not to go quite so speedily," said Thamar. "The great noise

of the wheels in this quiet place might give an alarm. She might again escape your hands."

The counsel was listened to; it was wise, and putting his impatience on one side, the speed was moderated, until Thamar cried out—

"It is here. The door is not locked; enter. I will guard your chariot."

The King went forward, and Tahoser, at last, was discovered. He lifted her in his great arms and strode out. She woke, and looking up saw the face of Pharaoh glowing above her. She thought at first it was part of her curious dream, but the cool air of the night that now came to her face caused her to soon see how real the happening was. She longed to cry out, but no voice came. Moreover, who could aid her against Pharaoh?

The King leapt into the chariot, and

grasping the reins, with a rapid turn he wound them around his waist. Tahoser, half dead with fear and shock, he held close to his heart.

The splendid horses once more crashed through the shadows of the night. This time Pharaoh knew the way to go, and in a very short time he slackened speed near the palace.

Thamar stayed in the cabin and tenderly watched the still sleeping Ra'hel.

CHAPTER XIII

What thoughts were racing through the brain of Tahoser during that mad night ride? She had, in fact, no more ideas than has a dove that quivers before an eagle. A mute terror stupefied her, icing the blood and keeping most of her faculties benumbed. Twice she felt sure two flaming lips found hers. She did not avoid them, for fear had killed prudery.

When she recognized a portal of the palace despair seized her. She struggled and tried to escape from the iron arm that held her. The struggle was hopeless, almost senseless. Her royal ravisher smiled proudly, and pressed her closer, yet closer. She cried, and a long kiss closed her mouth. And now the ride was over, and the horses stood in a vast court-

yard of the palace, with a group of grooms getting them out of the chariot. Tahoser was carried from the chariot by the King, just as one might have carried a little girl. He placed his burden carefully upon her feet, and feeling her tremble, said to her—

"Be reassured. You reign over Pharaoh. Pharaoh reigns over the whole of the world."

These remarkable words were the first he had ever uttered to her. If love was guided by reason, then, most certainly, Tahoser should have desired Pharaoh to Poëri. The King had an almost superhuman beauty; features pure and regular as though sculptured, and the habit of using power had given his eyes a penetrating light. His lips were reddish-purple, and when he smiled graciously no one would resist him. His figure was very

tall, in proportion, and wholly majestic. When he appeared in full state he seemed a creature of another race. By the side of such a being Poëri seemed small, yet Tahoser loved Poëri!

After having traversed many salons with Tahoser, guiding her by the hand, the King seated himself upon a throne in a chamber that was splendidly decorated with hieroglyphics and costly furniture. In its midst a great table, supported by carved figures of captives, was loaded with gorgeous flowers, and their suave emanations perfumed the air of the vast chamber.

In this splendid place all things chanted the eternal glory of Pharaoh. Yet the child of Petamounoph was not impressed. She thought of the sweet pavilion of Poëri, and the cabin she was torn from. Pharaoh held her hand as she stood before him, and looked deeply into her eyes.

The young girl had for clothing only the poor robe Ra'hel had lent, but her beauty did not lose; it gained. She was half naked, holding together with one hand the heavy stuff of the robe, which appeared to try and fall in order to show the amber and other tints of her most beautiful body. There were, and ever had been, many lovely women in the harem of Pharaoh, but none were so superb as Tahoser, and the eyes of the King shone with flames. Before the light and fire of those eyes Tahoser lowered hers.

In her innermost heart she felt proud of having excited the love of this great being. Where is the woman who has *no* vanity? Nevertheless she would have preferred to follow into the desert the young Hebrew. The King alarmed her. She could not withstand the glowing splendours of his face and his ardent desire. Her knees

failed her. Pharaoh read her trouble in her eyes, and tenderly set her upon a cushion at his feet. Then he said—

"O Tahoser, I love you." (He leant forward and kissed her upon her hair.) "When I first saw you from the height of my triumphal litter, that was carried above the brows of men by my officers, a sentiment strange to me entered into my soul. I, whose least desire is anticipated, deeply desired something; I then understood that I was not over all, superior to all, self-sufficing. Until then I had lived solitary in my glory and powerfulness, solitary in my soul, and in the heart of my monstrous palaces, at times surrounded by smiling shadows that called themselves women—and made no more impression upon me than the painted procession of those frescoes. I hear from afar the murmur and plaint of the nations upon

whose heads I had scattered the dust of my sandals, or whom I had dragged by the hair into captivity, as is represented upon the bas-reliefs upon the pylons. In my breast, cold and hard as that of a god of black basalt, I could not hear the beating of my heart. It seemed to me that there had never been any one upon the earth like me, that there would never be any one who could move me; in vain, when upon my expeditions to foreign nations, I took chosen virgins and women famous in their land for beauty: I let them fall from me after a time, as I would let fall a flower whose perfume I had inhaled. None gave me the desire to see them again. When they were present I scarcely saw them; absent they were soon forgotten. Taia, Amensé, Hont-Reché—whom I have kept through disgust of the quest for others who on the morrow would be

indifferent to me—have never been anything but vain phantoms, perfumed and gracious, but still like creatures of another race with whom I could not mix, to whom I could not become bound. The leopard cannot unite with the gazelle, the things of the air with the things of the water; I thought that, placed by the gods beyond and above mortal men, I could not partake their sorrows or their joys. An immense *ennui* has held me when upon my throne, where often I have sat like a granite colossus dreaming of the Impossible, the Infinite, the Eternal. Often I have dreamt of raising the veil of Isis, at the risk of falling at the feet of the goddess, dead. Perhaps, I have said, that mysterious figure is the being of whom I dream, who will inspire me with love. If earth refuses me joy, I will mount to the heavens. . . But when I saw you, I knew that there

lived one who, beyond myself, was a necessary being, with imperious claims upon me, fatal, and whom I knew not how to pass by or forget, and who had the power to render me unhappy. *I was Pharaoh, King, Over-Lord, almost a God; O Tahoser, thou hast made of me a Man!*"

Perhaps never before had Pharaoh uttered so lengthy a speech. Usually a word and look sufficed for his will to be done. To Tahoser he seemed to have almost renounced his impassive, marble-like majesty. Now he spoke and explained, and evidently was moved as most mortals are.

Tahoser was a prey to singular trouble of the spirit. Though she gloried in being the honoured one who had inspired love in the great favourite of Amon-Ra, to whom she hardly dared lift her eyes, so fearsome, solemn, and superb was he, she

did not feel for him the sympathy without which love is impossible. The thought of belonging to him inspired her with fear. To the Pharaoh who had, literally, stolen her body for the fulfilment of his passion, she could not give her soul. *That* rested with Poëri and Ra'hel.

She answered the King—

"How does it befall, I wonder, O King that among all the daughters of Egypt your regard should fall upon me, whom so many surpass in beauty, in talents, and gifts of all kinds. In the midst of all the lovely lotus blooms, you yet choose a flower of the field that nothing distinguishes!"

"It matters not. But learn that in all the world you alone exist for me. I will make the daughters of kings to be your slaves."

"And if I do not love you?" said Tahoser timidly.

"What matters that if I love you? Resist or hate me, you will be but the more charming. For the first time my will encounters an obstacle, I shall learn to vanquish it."

"And if I love another?" continued Tahoser, emboldened by the power obviously in her hands.

Pharaoh frowned and bit his lips. He grasped the girl's hands so tightly that he hurt them. Then he by a great effort became more calm, and, looking again deeply into the questioning eyes of Tahoser, he resumed speaking this time in a slow and very profound voice—

"When you have lived in this palace, in the midst of these splendours, wrapped around with my love, you will forget all, as those forget who take the drugs that destroy all memory. Your life will pass as a dream, and all your former emotions will pass

away like the smoke from a thurifer. The woman loved by a King must have no memory of any other man. Accustom yourself to Pharaohic magnificences, empty my treasury, pour out gold like water, command, do or undo, abase or elevate whom you will, but be my mistress, my wife and queen. I will give you Egypt and its priests, armies and slaves; its innumerable peoples, palaces, temples and villas. Tear them apart, if you desire, as a piece of silken gauze. I will give you other realms, grander, lovelier, richer. You are the sole one I love. Tahoser who was merely the daughter of the High Priest exists no more. But there is she whom I love, Pharaoh's queen."

CHAPTER XIV

When Ra'hel awoke she was surprised not to find Tahoser by her side. She looked around thinking that the young Egyptian had already risen. Crouched in a corner Thamar slept, or seemed to. Did one look closely, her eyes could be seen gleaming with a cruel joy—the joy that comes of successful treachery.

"Thamar," cried Ra'hel. "What has become of Tahoser? . . . "

The old woman started as though she had been rudely awakened by the voice of her mistress, and standing up rubbed her eyes. Then she said in well-feigned astonishment—

"Is she, then, no longer with us?"

"No," replied Ra'hel, "and if I had not seen her place hollowed in my bed, and the

robe she left, I should have believed that the amazing events of last night were a dream."

Thamar pretended to search in and around the cabin, then returned to say there was no trace.

"That is strange," said Ra'hel pensively.

"Mistress," said the old woman, approaching the beautiful Israelite fawningly, "you know that this stranger did not please me."

"Every one displeases you, Thamar," said Ra'hel, smiling.

"Except you, Mistress."

"Yes. I know you are devoted to me."

"But was I wrong?" said Thamar. "This Tahoser was a demon sent to tempt a child of Israel."

"But her tears were real tears. But you think that poor Tahoser was a phantom sent from hell?"

"Certainly," said Thamar. "Is it possible that the daughter of the High Priest would love Poëri, and prefer him to Pharaoh, whom they say desires her? If she loved him so much, why did she not become his second wife? No. She had to renounce her false gods and worship Jehovah: that put to flight the disguised demon."

"The 'demon,' as you call her, had a very sweet voice, and most tender eyes," was Ra'hel's last answer.

Saying she wanted to get provisions, Thamar made her way to the palace, taking a great linen bag that she hoped to fill with gold. Again Timopht took her into the presence of the King, who confirmed his promise that she was to take as much gold as she could carry from the Royal Treasury. Soon an immense heap of gold shone before her, and she flung

herself upon it with an avidity that was as mad as it was bestial. She plunged her arms into the gold even up to her shoulders. She embraced the precious stuff, turned it over, almost worshipped it. Her lips trembled, and she quivered with base pleasure. Maddened, she pulled handful after handful into the big bag, crying, "Again, again, more," till it was full to the mouth. Timopht, grimly amused, let her do it. He did not dream she could lift the bag. But to his great surprise she got it upon her back. Avarice lent to her old body unheard-of carrying power! At last, somehow, she staggered out of the palace, and the load of gold was hers by right. After a time two Israelites who passed helped her carry the treasure after she had promised them a good reward. They arrived soon at the outskirts of the city, and in a cabin built of mud they

deposited their load. Thamar, after much fumbling, gave them the money she had promised, and they left her a rich woman.

* * * * *

By this time Tahoser had been installed in a splendid and royal chamber, as fine in every way as Pharaoh's own. With the many rare things it contained one could have paid a king's ransom! Seated upon an ivory chair, Tahoser gazed at rich stuffs and jewels that were shown her by many girl attendants. When she had come from a bath, recently taken, the aromatic ointments with which they had rubbed and kneaded her had made yet more supple and lustrous her fine clear skin. She shone like agate. Truly her beauty was almost superhuman, and when she now looked into a mirror, she smiled, pleased at her image. A large robe of gauze enveloped her body.

but did not hide it. For sole ornament she had chosen a necklace of lapis-lazuli.

Pharaoh appeared on the threshold. Upon seeing him Tahoser would have prostrated herself before him, but the King came to her and raising her bade her be seated.

"Do not humiliate yourself thus, O Tahoser," he said in a softened voice. "I wish you to be my equal. I tire of being alone in the universe. Though I am all-powerful and have you in my possession, I await the day when you will love me as though I was man and man only. . . . Lose all fear. Be a woman with all a woman's wishes, sympathies and caprices. If your heart pleads at last for me, then when I enter your chamber hold out to me the lotus flower that is in your hair."

Timopht now craved to see the King.

He was permitted to do so, and cried out in great agitation—

"O King, a mysterious man demands to see you. Some strange unknown force goes with him. The guards cannot stop him, and all doors open before his touch. That which he commands, one must do; I was compelled to come to you!"

"What is he called?" asked the King.

Timopht responded, "Mosché."

CHAPTER XV

THE King passed into an audience-chamber, and seated himself upon a throne.

Mosché appeared, and another Hebrew, named Aḥaron, accompanied him. Without prostrating himself, Mosché stepped to the throne, and said—

"Thus hath spoken the God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may worship me in the desert."

Pharaoh replied, "Who is the God of Israel? I do not know of him, and I will not let the Israelites go.'

The reply came, "The God of the Hebrews is manifest to us. We wish to go into the desert, a three days' journey, and sacrifice to the Eternal, our God, so that he will not strike us with the plague or the sword."

Then spoke Pharaoh, and asked why they wished to turn the Israelites from their occupations, and gravely and bitterly he reproved and dismissed them. But they returned and wrought marvels and miracles before the King, and then Tahoser pleaded herself for the unhappy enslaved Hebrews. But he would not hearken.

"Forget," said he, "these vain prodigies, and be at rest. Let us live here in peace, thinking rather of the love I have for you. Dream that Pharaoh has more power than the impossible divinity of the Hebrews."

"Yes. I know that you are Lord and Over-Lord of captive peoples, and that before your face men are as sand before the wind. But——"

"But nevertheless I cannot make you love me," smiled Pharaoh.

"The ibex fears the lion, the dove the hawk, and the eye fears the sun. Mere

human weakness must take a long time before it dare look upon the face of majesty. A god always terrifies a mortal."

"I regret, Tahoser, that you have any fear of me. But if I cannot make of the King a mere man to woo you, I can make of the woman a Queen. The Queen of Egypt will not fear its King!"

"Even if you cause me to be seated by your side upon the throne, my thoughts will still be at your feet. But you are so good and your beauty is so far above the bodily beauty of this life that perhaps at last my heart will become emboldened and will dare to beat near yours."

So went on the Pharaoh's wooing. The daughter of the High Priest could not forget Poëri, and sought to gain time by flattering and, so to speak, fanning the flame of the King's passion. To escape and find Poëri, that was impossible.

Ra'hel was, of course, a dangerous rival in spite of her generosity. Then the love of Pharaoh really touched her. . . . She would have liked to love him, and was nearer to doing so than she dreamt.

CHAPTER XVI

Now followed the dreadful plagues of Egypt, that were invoked by the magic and incantations of Mosché and Aharon in order to terrify the Pharaoh. At last he said—

"Go. Sacrifice to your God where and how you will!"

Hearing this, Tahoser tenderly placed her arms around the King's throat, and said—

"I love you now; for you have become a man. You are no longer a god of granite."

Pharaoh did not reply to Tahoser at once. The plague had stricken with death his firstborn. His pride revolted even while he submitted. In his heart he did not have any belief in the Eternal God of

the Hebrews, and he explained the plagues as magic that was greater than that of the Egyptians. . . .

And Tahoser: had she forgotten her Hebrew love? No, but she feared that Pharaoh would order a massacre of the Israelites, and then Poëri and the sweet Ra'hel would suffer. So she sought to turn aside the King's anger by her caresses and sweet words.

"I have now no son," said Pharaoh to her one day. "O Tahoser, if I die, you will be Queen of Egypt."

"Why do you speak of your death?" said Tahoser. "The years make no mark upon you. Around you the generations fall as leaves fall around a great tree."

"I, the invincible, have I not been vanquished?" replied Pharaoh sadly. "To what good do the bas-reliefs and wall-paintings of palace and temple represent

me armed with whip and sceptre speeding my war-chariot over the dead? I am obliged to give way to the sorceries of two strange magicians if the gods do not aid me against the unknown God of this Israelite race. The prestige of my power is gone for ever. My people murmur; I am a vain shadow. Since you now love me I will try to forget, and we will be espoused soon."

Fearing that Pharaoh would retract his word, the Hebrews began to depart. Then Pharaoh had a mad mood come upon him, and he resolved to pursue them, but he and all his army were ingulfed in the waters of the sea. Tahoser was Queen of Egypt.

CHAPTER THE LAST

TAHOSER awaited in vain Pharaoh, and reigned over Egypt; then she died at the end of but a little time. They placed her in the magnificent tomb prepared for the King, whose body they could not find, and her history, written out upon a papyrus with the heads of the chapters in red characters, all by Kakevou, Keeper of the Books, was placed by her side near her breast-bandages. Was it Pharaoh or Poëri whom she most deeply regretted? The bookman Kakevou did not say, and Doctor Rumphius, who translated the papyrus written by Kakevou, did not dare to take upon himself to decide the question by any gloss upon the original document.

As to the Lord Evandale, he did not marry and did not wish to, he said. This

seemed strange to his friends, for his lordship was the last of his race. The ladies of his class in England could not understand his attitude to them. But, could they possibly believe or imagine that Lord Evandale was retrospectively in love with Tahoser, daughter of the High Priest Petamounoph, dead about three thousand five hundred years ago! There are nevertheless English follies with less reason in them than this folly of Lord Evandale's.

THE DREAMLAND BRIDE

THE DREAMLAND BRIDE

You ask me, brother, if I have loved. Yes, I have loved! The story is singular and terrible, and, for all my sixty-six years, I scarce dare stir the ashes of that memory.

To you I can refuse nothing; to a heart less hardened than yours this tale could never be told by me. For these things were so strange that I can scarce believe they came into my own existence. Three years was I the fool of a delusion of the devil. Three years was I a parish priest by day, while by night, in dreams (God grant they were but dreams!) I led the life of a child of this world, of a lost soul!

For one kind glance at a woman's face was my spirit to be doomed; but at length, with God to aid, and my patron saint, it was permitted to me to drive away the evil spirit that possessed me.

I lived a double life, by night and by day. All day long was I a pure priest of the Lord, concerned only with prayer and holy things; but when I closed my eyes in sleep then I was a young knight, a lover of women, of horses and hounds, a drinker, a dicer, a blasphemer, and, when I woke at dawn, meseemed that I was fallen on sleep, and did but dream that I was a priest. From those years of dreaming certain memories yet remain with me; memories of words and things that will not drown. Aye, though I have never left the walls of my vicarage, he who heard me would rather deem me one that had lived in the world and left it, to die in

religion, and end in the breast of God his tumultuous day, than for a priest grown old in a forgotten church, deep in a wood, and far from the things of this earth.

Yes, I have loved as never man loved, with a wild love and a terrible one, so that I marvel my heart did not burst asunder. Oh, the nights of long ago! From my earliest childhood had I felt the call to be a priest. This was the end of all my studies, and, till I was twenty-four, my days were one long training. My theological course achieved, I took the lesser orders, and, at length, at the end of Holy Week was to be the hour of my ordination.

I had never entered the world; my world was the college close. Vaguely I knew that women existed, but of women I never thought. My heart was wholly pure. Even my old and infirm mother I

saw but twice a year; of other worldly relations I had none.

I had no regrets and no hesitations in taking the irrevocable vow; nay, I was full of an impatient joy. Never did a young bridegroom so eagerly count the hours to his wedding. In my sleep I dreamed of saying the Mass. To be a priest seemed to me the noblest thing in the world, and I would have disdained the estate of poet or of king. To be a priest! My ambition was nothing higher.

All this I tell you that you may know how little I deserved that which befel me; that you may know how inexplicable was the fascination by which I was overcome.

The great day came, and I walked to church as if I were winged or walked on air. I felt an angelic beatitude, and marvelled at the gloomy and thoughtful faces of my companions, for we were many

The night I had passed in prayer. I was all but entranced in ecstasy. The bishop, a venerable old man, was in my eyes like a god, and I seemed to see heaven open beyond the arches of the minster.

You know the ceremony: the Benediction, the Communion in both kinds, the anointing of the palms of the hands with consecrated oil, and finally, the celebration of the holy rite, offered up in company with the bishop.

On these things I will not linger, but oh, how true is the word of Job, that he is foolish who maketh not a covenant with his eyes! I chanced to raise my head, and saw before me, so near that it seemed I could touch her, though in reality she was at some distance, and on the further side of a railing, a young dame royally clad, and of incomparable beauty.

It was as if scales had fallen from my eyes; and I felt like a blind man who suddenly recovers his sight. The bishop, so splendid a moment ago, seemed to fade; through all the church was darkness, and the candles paled in their sconces of gold, like stars at dawn.

Against the gloom that lovely thing shone out like a heavenly revelation, seeming herself to be the fountain of light, and to give it rather than receive it.

I cast down my eyes, vowing that I would not raise them again; my attention was failing, and I scarce knew what I did. The moment afterwards I opened my eyes, for through my eyelids I saw her shining in a bright penumbra, as when one has stared at the sun. Ah, how beautiful she was!

The greatest painters, when they have sought in heaven for ideal beauty, and

have brought to earth the portrait of Our Lady, came never near unto the glory of this vision! Pen of poet, palette of painter, can give no vision of her. She was tall, with the bearing we give to a goddess. Her fair hair flowed about her brows in streams of gold. Like a crowned queen she stood there, with her broad, white brow and dark eyebrows; with her eyes of the brightness and life of the green sea, and at one glance made or marred the destiny of a man. They were astonishingly clear and brilliant, shooting rays like arrows, which I could see winging straight for my heart. I know not if the flame that lighted them came from heaven or hell, but from one or other assuredly it came. Angel or devil, or both; this woman was no child of Eve, the mother of us all. White teeth shone in her smile, little dimples came and went with each

movement of her mouth, among the roses of her cheeks. There was a lustre as of agate on the smooth and shining skin of her half-clad shoulders, and chains of great pearls no whiter than her neck fell over her breast.

From time to time she lifted her head in snake-like motion, and set the silvery ruffles of her raiment quivering. She wore a flame-coloured velvet robe, and from the ermine lining of her sleeves her delicate hands came and went, as transparent as the fingers of the dawn. As I gazed at her, I felt within me, as it were, the opening of gates that had ever been barred; I saw sudden vistas of an unknown future; all life seemed altered, new thoughts wakened in my heart. A horrible pain took possession of me; each minute seemed at once a moment and an age. The ceremony went on and on, and I was being

carried far from the world, at whose gates my new desires were beating. I said "Yes" when I wished to say "No," when my whole soul protested against the words my tongue was uttering. A hidden force seemed to drag them from me. This it is, perhaps, which makes so many young girls walk to the altar with the firm resolve to refuse the husband who is forced on them, and this is why not one of them does what she intends. This is why so many poor novices take the veil, though they are determined to tear it into shreds rather than speak the vows. None dare cause so great a scandal before so many observers, nor thus betray such general expectation. The will of all imposes itself upon you; the gaze of all presses upon you like a leaden cope. Again, all is so very clearly arranged in advance, so evidently irrevocable, that the intention

to refuse is crushed out utterly, for ever.

The expression of the unknown lovely being changed as the ceremony advanced. Tender, caressing at first, it became contemptuous, disdainful. With an effort that might have moved a mountain, I strove to cry out that I would never be a priest; it was in vain, my tongue would not help in any cry, I could not refuse even by a sign. Though quite awake, I seemed to be in one of the nightmares wherein you cannot utter the word on which your life depends. She appeared to understand the torture which I endured, and cast on me a glance of divine pity and promise.

"Be mine," she seemed to say, "and I shall make thee happier than God, and heaven and His angels will be jealous of thee. Tear the shroud of death wherein thou art swathed, for I am Beauty, and

Youth, and Life; come to me, together we shall be Love. What can Jehovah offer thee in exchange for thy youth? Our life will flow like a dream in the eternity of a kiss. Cast but the wine from that chalice and thou, art free, and I will carry thee to the Unknown Isles, and thou shalt sleep upon my breast in a bed of gold beneath a canopy of silver; for I love thee, and would fain take thee from thy God, before whom so many noble hearts offer up the incense of their love, which dies before it reaches the heaven where He dwells."

These words I seemed to hear singing in the sweetest of tunes, the words which her eyes sent to me resounded in my heart as if they had been whispered in my soul. I was ready to forswear God, and yet I went through each rite of the ceremony. She cast me a second glance, so full of

entreaty and despair that I felt more swords pierce me than ever pierced the heart of Our Lady of Sorrows.

It was over. I was a priest. Then never surely did human force declare so keen a sorrow: the girl who sees her betrothed fall dead at her side, the mother by the empty cradle, Eve at the gate of Eden, the miser who seeks his treasure and finds but a stone, even they look less sorely smitten, less inconsolable. The blood left her sweet face pale; her lovely arms fell powerless, her feet failed her, and she leaned against a pillar. I staggered to the door with a white face and moist eyes, breathless, and with all the weight of the dome upon my head. As I was crossing the threshold a hand seized one of mine. It was a woman's hand, and though cold, yet it seemed to burn me like a brand.

"Miserable man, what hast thou done?" she whispered, and was then absorbed into the crowd.

The old bishop paused, and gazed severely at me, who was a piteous spectacle, now red, now pale, dazed and faint. One of my colleagues had compassion on me and took me home. I could not have gone alone. At the corner of a street, while the young priest's head was turned, a black page, curiously clad, came up to me and gave me as he passed a little leathern case with corners of wrought gold, signing to me to hide it. I thrust it into my sleeve and kept it till I was alone in my cell. Then I unclasped it. There were but these words written in it—

Clarimonde
at the
Palazzo Concini.

So little was I a worldling that I had

never heard of Clarimonde despite her fame, nay, nor knew where the Palazzo Concini was. I made many guesses, but so that I did but see her again, I cared little whether Clarimonde were a noble lady or no better than one of the wicked. This love, thus born in an hour, had taken root too deep for me to dream of casting it from me. This woman had made me utterly her own, a glance had been enough to change me, her will swayed mine, I lived not for myself but for her.

Many mad things did I, kissing my hand where hers had touched it, repeating her name for hours—*Clarimonde, Clarimonde.* I had but to close my eyes and she stood before me again as distinctly as if she were present. Then I murmured the words that she had spoken under the porch of the church: "Miserable man, what hast thou done?"

I felt the horror of the strait wherein I was, and the dead and terrible aspect of the life that I had chosen was now revealed. *To be a priest!* Never to love, to know not the call of youth and sex, to turn from beauty, to close the eyes and crawl in the chill shade of cloister or church, to see none but deathly men, to watch by corpses, to wear the cassock in which they would at last bury me!

Then life arose in me like a river in flood, my blood rioted in my veins, my youth burst and flowered forth in a moment. How was I again to have sight of Clarimonde? I had no excuse for leaving the seminary, for I knew nobody in the town, and indeed was only waiting there till I should be appointed to a parish.

I tried to remove the bars of the window, but to descend without a ladder was almost impossible. Then, again, I could only

escape by night, when I should be lost in the labyrinth of streets. Those difficulties which might have been nothing to others were enormous to a poor priest, now first in ove. without experience, money or knowledge of the world.

Ah! Had I not been a priest I might have seen her every day, I might have been her lover, her husband, I said to myself in the blindness of my heart. In place of being swathed in a cassock I might have worn silk and velvet, chains of gold, a sword and feather like all the fair young knights. My locks would not be tonsured but would fall in perfumed curls around my throat. But one hour spent before an altar and some garbled words, had cut me off from the company of the living. With my own hands I had sealed the stone upon the tomb of my past life; I had turned the key in the lock of my prison.

I walked to the window. The sky was heavenly blue, the trees had clothed them in the raiment of spring, all nature smiled with mockery in her smile. The square was full of people coming and going: young exquisites, young beauties, two by two, were walking in the direction of the gardens.

Workmen sang songs as they passed. On all sides there was a life, a movement, a gaiety that did but increase my sorrow and my solitude. A young mother, on the steps of the gate, was playing with her child, kissing its rosy little mouth with a hundred caresses, the childlike and divine caresses that are the secret of mothers.

Near them the father, with folded arms above a happy heart, smiled softly as he watched them. I could not continue to look without pain, but closed the window and flung myself on the bed with a feeling

of horrible jealousy and hatred, so that I gnawed my fingers and my coverlet like a starved and untamed beast.

How long I lay thus I know not, but at last, as I turned in a spasm of rage, I saw the Abbé Sérapiôn curiously regarding me. I bowed my head in shame and hid my face with my hands.

"Romuald, my friend," said he, "some strange thing hath befallen thee. Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee like wheat; he goeth about to devour thee as a raging lion. Beware and make thyself a breastplate of prayer, a shield of the mortifying of the flesh. Fight and thou shalt overcome. Be not afraid with any discouragement; for the firmest hearts and the most surely guarded have known hours like these. Pray, fast, meditate, and the evil spirit will pass away from thee."

The Sérapion told me that the priest

of C—— was dead, that the bishop had appointed me to this charge, and that I must be ready by the morrow. I nodded assent, and the Abbé departed. I opened my Missalah and strove to read in it, but the lines wavered confusedly and the volume slipped unheeded from my hands.

Next day Sérapion came for me; two mules were waiting for us at the gate with our slender baggage, and we mounted as well as we could. As we traversed the streets I looked around for Clarimonde in each balcony and window. But it was too early, and the city was yet asleep. When we had passed the gates and were climbing the heights, I turned back for a last glance at the place that was the home of Clarimonde. The shadow of a cloud lay on the city, the red roofs and the blue were mingled in a mist, whence rose here and there white puffs of smoke. By some

strange optical effect one house stood up golden in a ray of light far above the roofs that were mingled in the mist. A league away though it was, it seemed quite close to us—all was plain to see; turrets, balconies, parapets, the weathercocks even.

"What is that palace we see yonder in the sunlight?" said I to Sérapion. He shaded his eyes with his hands, looked and answered—

"That is the old palace which Prince Concini has given to Clarimonde the harlot. Therein dreadful things are done."

Even at that moment, whether it were the actual or the ideal I know not, methought I saw a white and slender shape cross the terrace, glance and disappear. It was Clarimonde! . . .

Ah! did she know how in that hour, at the height of the rugged way which led me from her, even at the crest of the ascent I

should never tread again, I was watching her, eager and restless, watching the palace where she dwelt? By a mystery of mirage or light and a shade the palace seemed very near as if inviting me to enter and be lord of all. Doubtless she knew it, so closely bound was her heart to mine; and this it was which had urged her in the raiment of the night, to climb the palace terrace in the frosty dews of dawn. The shadow slipped over the palace and, anon, there was but a motionless sea of roofs, marked merely by a billowy undulation of forms. Sérapion pricked on his mule, mine also hastened, and a winding of the road hid from me for ever the city of S——, where I was to return no more. At the end of three days' journey through sad fields we saw the steeple of my parish church high above the trees. Some winding lanes, bordered by cottages and gardens, brought us to the

building, which was certainly of no great splendour. A porch with a few mouldings, and two or three pillars rudely carved in sandstone, a tiled roof with counterforts of sandstone—that was all. To the left was the graveyard deep in tall grasses, with an iron cross in the centre. The priests' house was to the right in the shadow of the church. Simplicity could not be further used nor cleanliness made less lovely. There was an old dog and an elderly housekeeper, and when she learned that both were to be retained in my service her joy was great.

When I had been installed Sérapion returned to the college. I was left alone.

Unsupported, uncomforted as I was, the thought of Clarimonde again beset me, nor could I drive her memory away for all my efforts. One evening, as I walked among the box-lined paths of my little garden, I

fancied that I saw among the trees the form of a woman, who followed all my movements, and whose green eyes glistened through the leaves. Green as the sea shone her eyes, but it was no more than a vision, for when I crossed to the other side of the alley, nothing did I find but the print of a little foot on the sand—a foot like the foot of a child. Now the garden was girt with high walls, and, for all my search, I could find no living thing within them. I have never been able to explain this incident, which, after all, was nothing to the strange adventures that were to follow.

Thus did I live for a whole year, fulfilling every duty of the priesthood—preaching, praying, fasting, visiting the sick, denying myself necessaries that I might give to the poor. But within me all was dry and barren—the fountains of grace were sealed.

I knew not the happiness which goes with the consciousness of a holy mission fulfilled. My heart was otherwhere; the words of Clarimonde dwelt on my lips like the ballad burden a man repeats against his will. Oh, my brother, consider this! For the lifting up of mine eyes to behold a woman have I been harried these many years, and my life hath been troubled for ever.

I shall not hold you longer with the story of these defeats and these victories; let me come to the beginning of the new life.

One night there was a violent knocking at my gate. The old housekeeper went to open it, and the appearance of a man richly clad, tawny of hue, armed with a long dagger, stood before her in the light of her lantern. She was terrified, but he soothed her, saying that he needs must see me instantly concerning a matter of my minis-

try. Barbara brought him upstairs to the room where I was about going to bed. There the man told me that his mistress, a lady of high degree, was on the point of death, and desired to see a priest. I answered that I was ready to follow him, and, taking with me such matters as are needful for extreme unction, I went down hastily. At the door were two horses, black as night, their breath rising in white clouds of vapour. The man held my stirrup while I mounted; then he laid one hand on the pommel, and vaulted on the other horse. Gripping his beast with his knees, he gave him his head, and we started with the speed of an arrow, my horse keeping pace with his own. We seemed in running to devour the way, the black trees fled in the darkness like an army in rout. A forest we crossed, so gloomy and so frozen cold that I felt in all

my veins a shudder of superstitious dread. The sparks struck from the flints by our coursers' feet followed after us like a trail of fire, and whoever saw us must have deemed us two ghosts riding the nightmare. Will-o'-the-wisps glittered across our path, the night birds clamoured in the forest deeps, and now and again shone out the burning eyes of wild cats. The manes of the horses tossed more wildly on the wind, the sweat ran down their sides, their breath came thick and loud. But whenever they slackened the groom called on them with a cry like nothing that ever came from a human throat, and again they ran their furious course. At last the tempest of their flight reached its goal; suddenly there stood before us a great dark mass, with shining points of flame. Our horses' hoofs clattered louder on a drawbridge, and we

thundered through the dark depths of a vaulted entrance which gaped between two monstrous towers. Within the castle all was confusion—servants with burning torches ran hither and thither through the courts; on the staircases lights rose and fell. I beheld a medley of vast buildings, columns, arches, parapet and balcony—a bewildering world of royal or of fancy palaces. The negro page who had given me the tablets of Clarimonde, and whom I recognized at a glance, helped me to alight. A seneschal in black velvet, with a golden chain about his neck, and an ivory wand in his hand, came forward to meet me, great tears rolling down his cheeks to his snowy beard.

"Too late," he said, "too late, sir priest! But if thou hast not come in time to save the soul, watch, I pray thee, with the unhappy body of the dead."

He took me by the arm; he led me to the hall where the corpse was lying, and I wept as bitterly as he, deeming that the dead was Clarimonde, the well and wildly loved. There stood a *prie-dieu* by the bed: a blue flame flickering from a cup of bronze cast all about the chamber a doubtful light, and here and there set the shadows fluttering.

In a chiselled vase on the table was one white rose faded, a single petal clinging to the stem; the rest had fallen like fragrant tears, and lay beside the vase. A broken black mask, a fan, masquerading gear of every kind were huddled on the chairs, and showed that death had come, unlooked for and unheralded, to that splendid house. Not daring to cast mine eyes upon the bed, I kneeled, and fervently began to repeat the Psalms, thanking God that between this woman and me He had set the

tomb, so that now her name might come like a thing enskied and sainted in my prayers.

By degrees this ardour slackened, and I fell a-dreaming. This chamber, after all, had none of the air of a chamber of death. In place of the corpse-laden atmosphere that I was wont to breathe in these vigils, there floated gently through the warmth a vapour of orient essences, a perfume of woman and of love. The pale glimmer of the lamp seemed rather the twilight of pleasure than the yellow burning of the taper that watches by the dead. I began to think of the rare hazard that brought me to Clarimonde in the moment when I had lost her for ever, and a sigh came from my breast. Then meseemed that one answered with a sigh behind me, and I turned unconsciously. 'Twas but an echo; but, as I turned, mine eyes fell on that which they had shunned—the bed where Clarimonde

lay in state. The flowered and crimson curtains, bound up with loops of gold, left the dead woman plain to view, lying at her length, with hands folded on her breast. She was covered with a linen veil, very white and glistering, the more by reason of the dark purple hangings, and so fine was the shroud that her fair body shone through it, with those beautiful, soft, waving lines, as of the swan's neck, that not even death could harden. Fair she was as a statue of alabaster carved by some skilled man for the tomb of a queen; fair as a young maid asleep beneath new-fallen snow.

I could endure no longer. The air as of a bower of love, the scent of the faded rose intoxicated me, and I strode through the chamber, stopping at each turn to gaze at the beautiful dead beneath the transparent shroud. Strange thoughts haunted

my brain. I fancied that she was not really gone, that it was but a device to draw me within her castle gates and to tell me all her love. Nay, one moment methought I saw her foot stir beneath its white swathings, and break the stiff lines of the shroud.

"Is she really Clarimonde?" I asked myself presently. "What proof have I? The black page may have entered the household of some other lady. Mad must I be thus to disquiet myself."

But the throbbing of my heart gave me an answer.

"It is she. . . . It is she!"

I drew near to the bed and looked with fresh attention at that which thus perplexed me. Shall I confess it? The perfection of her beauty, though shadowed and sanctified by death, harassed my heart, and that long rest of hers was

wondrous like a living woman's sleep. I forgot that I had come there to watch by a corpse, and I dreamed that I was a young bridegroom on the threshold of the chamber of the veiled, half-hidden bride!

Broken with sorrow, wild with joy, shuddering with dread and desire, I stooped toward the dreamland bride and raised a corner of the sheet. Gently I raised it, holding my breath as though I feared to waken her. My blood coursed so fearsomely that I heard it surging through the veins of my temples. My brow was moist with sweat, as if I had lifted not filmy linen, but weighty marble.

There lay Clarimonde, even (in the face) as she was upon the day I was ordained a priest. The pallor of her cheeks, her dead lips fading coral, her long, downcast eye-lids with their brown lashes

breaking the marble of her cheek—all gave her an air of sadness and pureness, of pensive patience that had a winsome magic. Her long, loose hair, the small blue flowers yet strewn through it, pillowed her head and veiled the glory of the soft flesh of her shoulders. Her fair hands were crossed. The exquisite roundness and ivory sheen of her arms proved even in death a triumphant lure.

Long did I wait and watch her silently, and still the more I gazed the less I could deem that life had for ever left her beautiful body. I knew not if it were an illusion, or a reflection from the lamp, but it was as if the blood began to flow again beneath that dead white of her flesh, and yet she lay eternally, immovably still. I touched her arm; it was cold, but no colder than her hand had been on the day when it met mine beneath the church porch.

I fell into my old attitude, stooping my face above her face, while down upon her rained the warm dew of my tears. Oh, the bitterness of impotence and of despair; oh, wild agony of that death-watch! The night crept on, and as I felt that the eternal separation drew near, I could not deny myself the sad last delight of one kiss on the dead lips that held all my love.

Oh, miracle! A light breath mingled with my breath, and the mouth of Clarimonde answered to the touch of mine! Her eyes opened, and softly shone. She sighed, she uncrossed her arms, and folding them about my neck in a ravished ecstasy,—

"Ah, Romuald, it is thou!" she said, in a voice as sweet and languishing as the last trembling of a lyre. "Ah, Romuald, what makest thou here? So long have I waited for thee that I am dead. Yet now

we are betrothed, now I may see thee and visit thee. Farewell, Romuald, farewell! I love thee. It is all that I had to tell thee, and I give thee again that life which thou gavest me with thy kiss. Soon shall we meet again."

Her head sank down, but still her arms clung to me as if they would hold me for ever. A wild gust of wind burst open the window and broke into the room. The last leaf of the white rose fluttered like a bird's wing on the stem, and then fell and flew through the open casement, bearing with it the soul of Clarimonde.

The lamp went out, and I fell fainting on the breast of the beautiful corpse.

When I came to myself I was lying on my own bed in the little chamber of the priest's house; my hand had slipped from beneath the coverlet, the old dog was licking it. Barbara hobbled and trembled about the

room, opening and shutting drawers, and shaking powders into glasses. The old woman gave a cry of delight when she saw me open my eyes. The dog yelped and wagged his tail, but I was too weak to utter a word or make the slightest movement. Later, I learned that for three days I had lain thus, with no sign of life but a scarce-perceptible breathing. These three days do not count in my life; I know not where my spirit went wandering all that time, whereof I keep not the slightest memory. Barbara told me that the same bronzed man who had come for me at night, brought me back in a closed litter next morning, and instantly went his way. So soon as I could recall my thoughts, I reviewed each incident of that fatal night. At first I deemed that I had been duped by art magic, but presently actual, palpable circumstances destroyed that belief. I

could not suppose that I had been dreaming, for Barbara, no less than myself, had seen the man with the two coal-black steeds, and she described them accurately. Yet no one knew of any castle in the neighbourhood at all like that in which I had found Clarimonde again.

One morning Sérapion entered my room; he had come with all haste in answer to Barbara's message about my illness.

Though this declared his affection for me, none the more did his visit give me pleasure. There was somewhat inquisitive and piercing, to my mind, in the very glance of Sérapion, and I felt like a criminal in his presence. He it was who first discovered my secret disquiet, and I bore him a grudge for being so clear-sighted.

While he was asking about my health in accents of honeyed hypocrisy, his eyes, as

yellow as a lion's, were sounding the depths of my soul.

Presently, "The famous harlot Clarimonde is dead," says he in a piercing tone—"dead at the close of an eight-days' revel. It was a feast of Belshazzar or of Cleopatra. Good God, what an age is ours! The guests were served by dusky slaves, who spoke no tongue known among men, and who seemed like spirits from the pit. The livery of the least of them might have beseemed an emperor on a coronation day. Wild tales are told of this same Clarimonde, and all her lovers have perished miserably or by violence. They say she was a ghost, a female vampire, but I believe she was Satan himself."

He paused and watched me. I could not master a sudden movement at the name of Clarimonde.

"Satan's talons are long," said Sérapion,

with a stern look, "and tombs ere now have given up their dead. Threefold should be the seal upon the grave of Clarimonde, for this is not—it is said—the first time she hath died. God be with thee, Romuald."

So speaking, Sérapion departed with slow steps.

* * * * *

Time passed and I was well again. Nay, I deemed that the fears of Sérapion and my own terrors were too great, till one night I dreamed. . . . Scarce had I tasted the first drops of the cup of sleep when I heard the curtains of my bed open, and the rings rang. I raised myself on my arm and saw the one whom straightway I knew for Clarimonde.

She held in her hand a little lamp such as is placed in tombs, and the light touched

her dainty fingers to a rosy hue that merged slowly into the milk-white of her arm.

She was clad with naught but the linen shroud in which she had laid in state. The folds were clasped about her breast as it were in pudency, by a hand all too small. So white she was that her shroud and her body were blended in the pallid glow of the lamp.

Swathed thus in the fine tissue that betrayed every line of her figure, she seemed a marble image of some lady at the bath rather than a living woman. Dead or living, statue or woman, spirit or flesh, her beauty was ever the same, only the glitter of her sea-green eye was dulled—only the mouth, so red of old, wore but a tender tint of rose, like the white rose of her cheeks. The little blue flowers that I had seen in her hair were sere now, and

all but bloomless ; yet so winning was she, so winning that, despite the strangeness of the adventure, and her inexplicable invasion of my chamber, I was not afraid for one moment.

She placed the lamp on the table, and sat down by my bed-foot. Then, in those soft and silver accents which I never heard from any lips but hers,—

"Long have I made thee wait for me," she said, "and thou must have deemed that I had forgotten thee quite. But lo! I come from far, very far—even from that land whence no traveller has returned. There is no sunlight nor moon in the country whence I wander, only shadow and space. There the foot finds no rest, nor the wandering wing any way ; yet here am I—behold me, for Love can conquer Death. Ah, what sad faces and terrible eyes have I seen in my voyaging, and in what labour

hath my soul been to find my body and to make her home therein again! How hard to lift was the stone that they had laid on me for a covering! Lo, my hands are sorely wounded in that toil! Kiss them, my love, and heal them." And she laid her chill palms on my mouth, that I kissed many times, she smiling on me with an inexpressible sweetness of delight.

To my shame be it spoken, I had wholly forgotten the counsels of the Abbé Sérapion, and the sacred character of my ministry. I fell unresisting at the first attack. Nay, I did not even try to bid the tempter avaunt, but succumbed without a struggle before the sweet freshness of Clarimonde's fair body. Poor child! for all that is come and gone, I can scarce believe that she was indeed a devil; surely there was naught of the devil in her aspect. Never hath Satan better concealed his claws and

his horns! She was crouching on the side of my bed, her heels drawn up beneath her in an attitude of careless and provoking grace. Once and again she would pass her little hands among my locks, and curl them, as if to try what style best suited my face. It is worth noting that I felt no astonishment at an adventure so marvellous —nay, as in a dream the strangest events fail to surprise us, even so the whole encounter seemed to me perfectly natural.

"I loved thee long before I saw thee, Romuald, my love, and I sought for thee everywhere. Thou wert my dream, and I beheld thee in the church at that fatal hour. 'It is he,' I whispered to myself, and cast on thee a glance fulfilled of all the love wherewith I had loved, and did love, and shall love thee; a glance that would have ruined the soul of a cardinal, or brought a king with all his court to my feet.

"But thou wert not moved, and before my love thou didst place the love of God.

"Ah, 'tis of God that I am jealous—God whom thou hast loved and lovest more than me.

"Miserable woman that I am! Never shall I have all thy heart for myself alone—for me, whom thou didst awaken with one kiss; for me, Clarimonde the dead; for me, who for thy sake have broken the portals of the grave, and am come to offer to thee a life that hath been taken up again for this one end to make thee happy."

So she spoke; and every word was broken in on by maddening caresses, till my brain swam, and I feared not to console her by this awful blasphemy; namely—that my love of her passed my love of God.

Then the fire of her eyes was rekindled,

and they blazed as it had been the chrysoprase stone.

"Verily thou lovest me with a love like thy love of God," she cried, making her arms a girdle for my body. "Then thou shalt come with me, and whithersoever I go there wilt thou follow. Thou wilt leave these ugly black robes, thou wilt be of all knights the proudest and the most envied. The acknowledged lover of Clarimonde shalt thou be, of her who refused a Pope! Ah, happy life, ah, golden days, that shall be ours! When do we mount and ride, my gentleman?"

"To-morrow," I cried in my madness.

"To-morrow," she answered. "I shall have time to change this robe of mine that is somewhat scant, nor fit for voyaging. Also must I speak with my retainers, that think me dead in good earnest, and lament me as well as they may. Money, carriages,

change of raiment, all shall be ready for thee; at this hour to-morrow will I seek thee. Good-bye, sweetheart." She touched my brow with her lips, the lamp faded into darkness, the curtains closed, a sleep like lead came down on me, sleep without a dream. I wakened late, troubled by the memory of my dream, which at length I made myself believe was but a vision of the night. Yet it was not without dread that I sought rest again, praying Heaven to guard the purity of my slumber.

Anon I fell again into a deep sleep, and my dream began again. The curtains opened, and there stood Clarimonde, not pale in her pale shroud, nor with the violets of death upon her cheek; but gay, bright, splendid, in a travelling robe of green velvet with strappings of gold, and kilted upon one side to show a satin undercoat. Her fair, curled locks fell in great

masses from under a large black beaver hat, with strange white plumes; in her hand she held a little riding-whip, topped with a golden whistle. With this she touched me gently, saying—

"Awake, fair sleeper! Is it thus you prepare for your voyage? I had thought to find you alert. Rise, rise quickly; we have no time to lose!"

I leaped out of bed.

"Come, dress, and let us begone," she said, showing me a little packet she had brought. "Our horses are fretting and champing at the gate. We should be ten leagues from here."

I arrayed myself in haste, while she instructed me, handed me the various articles of a knight's attire, and laughed at my clumsiness. She dressed my hair, and when all was done, gave me a little Venice pocket-mirror in a silver frame, crying—

"What think you of yourself now? Will you take me for your valet de chambre?"

I did not know my own face in the glass, and was no more like myself than a statue is like the uncut stone. I was beautiful, and I was vain of the change. The gold embroidered gallant attire made me another man, and I marvelled at the magic of a few ells of cloth, fashioned to a certain device. The character of my clothes became my own, and in ten minutes I was sufficiently conceited. Clarimonde watched me with a kind of maternal fondness as I walked up and down the room, proving my new raiment, as it were; then—

"Come," she cried, "enough of this child's play! Up and away, my Romuald! We have far to go; we shall never arrive."

She took my hand and led me forth.

The gates opened at her touch; the dog did not waken as we passed.

At the gate we found the groom with three horses like those he had led before, Spanish horses that sped swift as the wind. Presently we came on a plain where a carriage and four horses waited for us. The postilion drove them to a mad gallop. My arm was around the waist of Clarimonde, her head upon my shoulder, her breast pressing against me. From then mine became a double life: within me were two men that knew each other not—the priest who dreamed that by night he was a noble, the noble who dreamed that by night he was a priest.

Certainly I was, or thought I was, in Venice, in a great palace on the Grand Canal. Clarimonde loved life in the great style. Custom could not make her common. To love her was to love a

score of mistresses. She returned my love a hundredfold. One day, when she had been unwell for a time, I cut my hand, and she sucked the blood from the wound.

"I shall not die! I shall not die!" she exclaimed. "I shall yet love thee long, for my life is in thine. Thy blood has given me back my life!"

This event and the strange fears it inspired haunted me long.

Sérapion often reproached me. One day he said—

"To drive away the demon that possesses thee, there is but one thing to do. I know where Clarimonde is buried. We must unearth her, and the sight of the worms and the dust of death will make thee thyself again."

So weary was I of my double life that I accepted his plan, and at midnight we

found her gravestone. Thereon we read these words—

ICI GÎT CLARIMONDE,
QUI FUT DE SON VIVANT
LA PLUS BELLE DU MONDE.

* * * * *

At length the pick of Sérapion smote the coffin lid, which he then raised, and I saw Clarimonde—on her pale mouth shone one drop of blood.

Sérapion, breaking forth into fury shouted—

"Ah, there thou art . . . Devil, Harlot, Vampire; thou that drainest the blood of men!"

With this he sprinkled holy water over her, and she straightway crumbled into dust.

"There lies thy love, Sir Romuald," he

said. "Go now and dally at the Lido with thy beauty."

I bowed my head. Within me all was ruin. Back to my poor priest's house I went. Romuald the lover said farewell to the priest. *But, next night, I saw Clarimonde!*

"Wretched man that thou art," she cried. "What hast thou done? Why hast thou hearkened to that foolish priest? Wert thou not happy? What ill had I done thee that thou must violate my tomb? Henceforth the link between our souls and bodies is broken. Thou shalt desire me. Farewell!"

Then she fled into space and I saw her never more. . . . Alas! It was truth she spoke; I long for her still. Dearly bought hath my salvation been, and the love of my Lord hath not been too much to replace the love of her

Behold, brother, the story of my youth.

Let not thine eyes gaze upon a woman. Walk with glances that only seek the earth. For, be ye chaste and calm as ye may, one minute may damn thee to all eternity.

THE
PRINCESS HERMONTHIS

THE
PRINCESS HERMONTHIS

I HAD entered, in an idle mood, the shop of one of those curiosity vendors who are called bric-à-brac dealers.

You have, doubtless, glanced occasionally through the windows of some of these shops, which have become so numerous now that it is fashionable to buy antiquated furniture, and that every petty stockbroker thinks he must have a mid-age chamber.

There is one thing there which clings alike to the shop of the dealer in old iron, the ware-room of the tapestry-maker, the laboratory of the chemist, and the studio of the painter; in all these gloomy dens

where a furtive daylight filters in through the window-shutters the most manifestly ancient thing is dust. The cobwebs are more authentic than the laces, and the old pear-tree furniture on exhibition is actually younger than the mahogany which arrived but yesterday from America.

The warehouse of my bric-à-brac dealer was a veritable Capharnaum. All ages and all nations seemed to have made their rendezvous there. An Etruscan lamp of red clay stood upon a Boule cabinet with ebony panels, brightly striped by lines of inlaid brass; a duchess of the court of Louis XV nonchalantly extended her fawn-like feet under a massive table of the time of Louis XIII, with heavy spiral supports of oak, and carven designs of chimeras and foliage intermingled.

Upon the denticulated shelves of several sideboards glittered immense Japanese

dishes with red and blue designs relieved by gilded hatching, side by side with enamelled works by Bernard Palissy, representing serpents, frogs and lizards in relief.

From disembowelled cabinets escaped cascades of silver-lustrous Chinese silks and waves of tinsel, which an oblique sunbeam shot through with luminous beads, while portraits of every era, in frames more or less tarnished, smiled through their yellow varnish.

The striped breastplate of a damascened suit of Milanese armour glittered in one corner; loves and nymphs of porcelain, Chinese grotesques, vases of celadon and crackle-ware, Saxon and old Sèvres cups encumbered the shelves and nooks of the apartment.

The dealer followed me closely through the tortuous way contrived between the

piles of furniture, warding off with his hand the hazardous sweep of my coat-skirts, watching my elbows with the uneasy attention of an antiquarian and a usurer.

It was a singular face, that of the merchant; an immense skull, polished like a knee, and surrounded by a thin aureole of white hair, which brought out the clear salmon tint of his complexion all the more strikingly, lent him a false aspect of patriarchal *bonhomie*, counteracted, however, by the scintillation of two little yellow eyes which trembled in their orbits like two louis d'or upon quicksilver. The curve of his nose presented an aquiline silhouette, which suggested the Oriental or Jewish type. His hands—thin, slender, full of nerves which projected like strings upon the finger-board of a livion, and armed with claws like those on

the ends of bats' wings—shook with senile trembling; but those convulsively-agitated hands became firmer than steel pincers or lobsters' claws when they lifted any precious article—an onyx cup, a Venetian glass, or a dish of Bohemian crystal. This strange old man had an aspect so thoroughly rabbinical and cabalistic that he would have been burnt on the mere testimony of his face three centuries ago. . . .

"Will you not buy something from me to-day, sir? Here is a Malay kreese with a blade undulating like flame. Look at those grooves contrived for the blood to run along, those teeth set backward so as to tear the body in drawing out the weapon. It is a fine, ferocious arm, and will look well in your collection. This two-handed sword is very beautiful. It is the work of Josepe de la Hera; and this *oolichemarde* with its fenestrated

guard—what a superb specimen of handicraft!"

"No; I have quite enough weapons and instruments of carnage. I want a small figure, something which will suit me as a paper-weight, for I cannot endure those trumpery bronzes which the stationers sell, and which may be found on everybody's desk."

The old gnome rambled and raked among his ancient wares, and finally arranged before me some antique bronzes, so called at least; fragments of malachite, little Hindoo or Chinese idols, a kind of toy in jade-stone, representing the incarnations of Brahma or Vishnu, and wonderfully appropriate to the very undivine office of holding papers and letters in place.

I was hesitating between a porcelain dragon, all constellated with warts, its mouth formidable with bristling tusks and

ranges of teeth, and an abominable little Mexican fetich, representing the god Vitzliputzili nude, when I caught sight of a charming foot, which I, at first, took for a fragment of some antique Venus.

It had those beautiful ruddy and tawny tints that lend to Florentine bronze that warm, living look so much preferable to the grey-green aspect of common bronzes, which might easily be taken for statues in a state of putrefaction. Satiny gleams played over its rounded forms, doubtless polished by the amorous kisses of twenty centuries, for it seemed a Corinthian bronze, a work of the best era of art, perhaps even moulded by Lysippus himself.

"That foot will be my choice," I said to the merchant, who regarded me with an ironical and saturnine air, and held out the object desired that I might examine it more fully.

I was surprised at its lightness. It was not a foot of metal, but in sooth a foot of flesh, an embalmed foot, a mummy's foot. On examining it still more closely, the very grain of the skin, and the almost imperceptible lines impressed upon it by the texture of the bandages, became perceptible. The toes were slender and delicate, and terminated by perfectly-formed nails, pure and transparent as agates. The great toe, slightly separated from the rest, afforded a happy contrast, in the antique style, to the position of the other toes, and lent it an aërial lightness—the grace of a bird's foot. The sole, scarcely streaked by a few almost imperceptible cross-lines, afforded evidence that it had never touched the bare ground, and had only come in contact with the finest matting of Nile rushes and the softest carpets of panther skin.

"Ha, ha, you want the foot of the Princess Hermonthis!" exclaimed the merchant, with a strange giggle, fixing his owlish eyes upon me. "Ha, ha, ha! For a paper-weight! An original idea!—artistic idea! Old Pharaoh would certainly have been surprised had some one told him that the foot of his adored daughter would be used for a paper-weight after he had had a mountain of granite hollowed out as a receptacle for the triple coffin, painted and gilded, covered with hieroglyphics and beautiful paintings of the Judgment of Souls," continued the queer little merchant half audibly, as though talking to himself.

"How much will you charge me for this mummy fragment?"

"Ah, the highest price I can get, for it is a superb piece. If I had the match of it you could not have it for less than

five hundred francs. The daughter of a Pharaoh! Nothing is more rare."

"Assuredly that is not a common article; but still, how much do you want? In the first place, let me warn you that all my wealth consists of just five louis. I can buy anything that costs five louis, but nothing dearer. You might search my vest pockets and most secret drawers without even finding one poor five-franc-piece more."

"Five louis for the foot of the Princess Hermonthis! That is very little, very little indeed. 'Tis an authentic foot," muttered the merchant, shaking his head, and imparting a peculiar rotary motion to his eyes. "Well, take it, and I will give you the bandages into the bargain," he added, wrapping the foot in an ancient damask rag. "Very fine! Real damask —Indian damask which has never been

re-dyed. It is strong, and yet it is soft," he mumbled, stroking the frayed tissue with his fingers, through the trade-acquired habit which moved him to praise even an object of such little value that he himself deemed it only worth the giving away.

He poured the gold coins into a sort of mediæval alms-purse hanging at his belt, repeating—

"The foot of the Princess Hermonthis to be used as a paper-weight!"

Then, turning his phosphorescent eyes upon me, he exclaimed in a voice strident as the crying of a cat which has swallowed a fish-bone—

"Old Pharaoh will not be well pleased. He loved his daughter, the dear man!"

You speak as if you were a contemporary of his. You are old enough, goodness knows! but you do not date back

to the Pyramids of Egypt," I answered laughingly from the threshold.

I went home, delighted with my acquisition.

With the idea of putting it to profitable use as soon as possible, I placed the foot of the divine Princess Hermonthis upon a heap of papers scribbled over with verses, in themselves an undecipherable mosaic work of erasures; articles freshly begun; letters forgotten, and posted in the table drawer instead of the letter-box, an error to which absent-minded people are peculiarly liable. The effect was charming, bizarre and romantic.

Well satisfied with this embellishment, I went out with the gravity and pride becoming one who feels that he has the ineffable advantage over all the passers-by whom he elbows, of possessing a piece of the Princess Hermonthis, daughter of Pharaoh.

I looked upon all who did not possess, like myself, a paper-weight so authentically Egyptian as very ridiculous people, and it seemed to me that the proper occupation of every sensible man should consist in the mere fact of having a mummy's foot upon his desk.

Happily I met some friends, whose presence distracted me in my infatuation with this new acquisition. I went to dinner with them, for I could not very well have dined with myself.

When I came back that evening, with my brain slightly confused by a few glasses of wine, a vague whiff of Oriental perfume delicately met my nostrils. The heat of the room had warmed the natron, bitumen and myrrh in which the paraschistes who cut open the bodies of the dead had bathed the corpse of the Princess. It was a perfume at once sweet and penetrating, a

perfume that four thousand years had not been able to dissipate.

The Dream of Egypt was Eternity. Her odours have the solidity of granite, and endure as long.

I soon drank deeply from the black cup of sleep. For a few hours all remained opaque to me. Oblivion and nothingness inundated me with their sombre waves.

Yet light gradually dawned upon the darkness of my mind. Dreams commenced to touch me softly in their silent flight.

The eyes of my soul were opened, and I beheld my chamber as it actually was. I might have believed myself awake but for a vague consciousness which assured me that I slept, and that something fantastic was about to take place.

The odour of the myrrh had augmented in intensity, and I felt a slight headache,

which I very naturally attributed to several glasses of champagne that we had drunk to the unknown gods and our future fortunes.

I peered through my room with a feeling of expectation which I saw nothing to justify. Every article of furniture was in its proper place. The lamp, softly shaded by its globe of ground crystal, burned upon its bracket; the water-colour sketches shone under their Bohemian glass; the curtains hung down languidly; everything wore an aspect of tranquil slumber.

After a few moments, however, all this calm interior appeared to become disturbed. The woodwork cracked stealthily, the ash-covered log suddenly emitted a jet of blue flame, and the disks of the pateras seemed like great metallic eyes, watching, like myself, for the things which were about to happen.

My eyes accidentally fell upon the desk where I had placed the foot of the Princess Hermonthis.

Instead of remaining quiet, as behoved a foot which had been embalmed for four thousand years, it commenced to act in a nervous manner, contracted itself, and leaped over the papers like a startled frog. One would have imagined that it had suddenly been brought into contact with a galvanic battery. I could distinctly hear the dry sound made by its little heel, hard as the hoof of a gazelle.

I became rather discontented with my acquisition, inasmuch as I wished my paper-weights to be of sedentary disposition, and thought it very unnatural that feet should walk about without legs, and I commenced to experience a feeling closely akin to fear.

Suddenly I saw the folds of my bed-

curtain stir, and heard a bumping sound, like that caused by some person hopping on one foot across the floor. I must confess I became alternately hot and cold, that I felt a strange wind chill my back, and that my suddenly-rising hair caused my night-cap to execute a leap of several yards.

The bed-curtains opened, and I beheld the strangest figure imaginable before me.

It was a young girl of a very deep coffee-brown complexion, like the bayadere Ámani, and possessing the purest Egyptian type of perfect beauty. Her eyes were almond-shaped and oblique, with eye-brows so black that they seemed blue; her nose was exquisitely moulded, almost Greek in its delicacy of outline; and she might indeed have been taken for a Corinthian statue of bronze but for the

prominence of her cheek-bones and the slightly African fulness of her lips, which compelled one to recognize her as belonging beyond all doubt to the hieroglyphic race which dwelt upon the banks of the Nile.

Her arms, slender and spindle-shaped like those of very young girls, were encircled by peculiar metal bands and bracelets of glass beads; her hair was all twisted into little cords, and she wore upon her bosom a little idol figure of green paste, bearing a whip with seven strings, which proved it to be an image of Isis; her brow was adorned with a shining plate of gold, and a few traces of paint relieved the coppery tint of her cheeks.

As for her costume, it was very odd indeed.

Imagine a skirt formed of little strips of material bedizened with red and black

hieroglyphics, stiffened with bitumen, and apparently belonging to a freshly-unbandaged mummy!

In one of those sudden flights of thought so common in dreams, I heard the hoarse falsetto of the bric-à-brac dealer repeating like a monotonous refrain the phrase he had uttered in his shop with so enigmatical an intonation—

"The Lord Pharaoh will not be pleased. He loved his daughter, the dear man!"

One strange circumstance, which was not at all calculated to restore my equanimity, was that the apparition had but one foot; the other was broken off at the ankle!

She approached the table where the foot was, starting and fidgeting about more than ever, and there supported herself upon the edge of the desk. I saw her eyes fill with pearly, gleaming tears.

Although she had not as yet spoken, I fully comprehended the thoughts which agitated her. She looked at the foot—for it was indeed her own—with an exquisitely graceful expression of coquettish sadness; but the foot leaped and ran hither and thither as though impelled on steel springs.

Twice or thrice she extended her hand to seize it, but could not succeed.

Then commenced between the Princess Hermonthis and her foot—which appeared to be endowed with a special life of its own—a very fantastic dialogue in a most ancient Coptic tongue, such as might have been spoken thirty centuries ago in the syrinxes of the land of Ser. Luckily I understood Coptic perfectly well that night.

The Princess Hermonthis cried, in a voice sweet and vibrant as the tones of a crystal bell—

"Well, my dear little foot, you always flee from me, yet I always took good care of you. I bathed you with perfumed water in a bowl of alabaster; I smoothed your heel with pumice mixed with palm oil; your nails were cut with golden scissors and polished; I was careful to select tatbebs for you, painted and embroidered and turned up at the toes, which were the envy of all the young girls in Egypt. You wore on your great toe rings bearing the device of the sacred Scarabæus, and you supported one of the lightest bodies that a lazy foot could sustain."

The foot replied in a chagrined tone—

"You know well that I do not belong to myself any longer. I have been bought and paid for. The old merchant knew what he was about. He bore you a grudge for having refused to espouse him. This is an ill turn which he has done you. The

Arab who violated your royal coffin in the subterranean pits of the necropolis of Thebes was sent thither by him. He desired to prevent you from being present at the reunion of the shadowy nations in the cities below. Have you five pieces of gold for my ransom?"

"Alas, no! My jewels, my rings, my purses of gold and silver were all stolen from me," answered the Princess Hermonthis with a sob.

"Princess," I then exclaimed, "I never retained anybody's foot unjustly. Even though you have not got the five louis which it cost me, I present it to you gladly. I should feel unutterably wretched to think that I were the cause of so amiable a person as the Princess Hermonthis being lame."

I delivered this discourse in a royally gallant, troubadour tone which must have astonished the beautiful Egyptian girl.

She turned a look of deepest gratitude upon me, and her eyes shone with gleams of light. She took her foot, which surrendered itself willingly this time, like a woman about to put on her little shoe, and adjusted it to her leg with much skill. This operation over, she took a few steps about the room as though to assure herself that she was really no longer lame.

"Ah, how pleased my father will be He was so unhappy because of my mutilation, and who from the moment of my birth set a whole nation at work to hollow me out a tomb so deep that he might preserve me intact until that last day, when souls must be weighed in the balance of Amenti! Come with me to my father. He will receive you kindly, for you have given me back my foot."

I thought this proposition natural enough. I arrayed myself in a dressing-gown of

large flowered pattern, which lent me a very pharaonic aspect, hurriedly put on a pair of Turkish slippers, and informed the Princess Hermonthis that I was ready to follow her.

Before starting, Hermonthis took from her neck the little idol of green paste, and laid it on the scattered sheets of paper which covered the table.

"It is only fair," she observed smilingly, "that I should replace your paper-weight."

She gave me her hand, which felt soft and cold, like the skin of a serpent, and we departed.

We passed for some time with the velocity of an arrow through a fluid and greyish expanse, in which half-formed silhouettes flitted swiftly by us, to right and left.

For an instant we saw only sky and sea.

A few moments later obelisks commenced

to tower in the distance; pylons and vast flights of steps guarded by sphinxes became clearly outlined against the horizon.

We had reached our destination. . . .

The Princess Hermonthis conducted me to a mountain of rose-coloured granite, in the face of which appeared an opening so narrow and low that it would have been difficult to distinguish it from the fissures in the rock, had not its location been marked by two stelæ wrought with sculptures.

Hermonthis kindled a torch and led the way before me.

We traversed corridors hewn through the living rock. Their walls, covered with hieroglyphics and paintings of allegorical processions, might well have occupied thousands of arms for thousands of years in their formation. These corridors of interminable length opened into square chambers, in the midst of which pits had

been contrived, through which we descended by cramp-irons or spiral stairways. These pits again conducted us into other chambers opening into other corridors, likewise decorated with painted hawks, serpents coiled in circles, the symbols of *tau* and *pedum*—prodigious works of art which no living eye can ever examine—interminable legends of granite which only the dead have time to read through all eternity.

At last we found ourselves in a hall so vast, so enormous, so immeasurable, that the eye could not reach its limits. Files of monstrous columns stretched far out of sight on every side, between which twinkled livid stars of yellowish flame; points of light which revealed further incalculable depths in the darkness beyond.

The Princess Hermonthis still held my hand, and graciously saluted the mummies of her acquaintance.

My eyes became accustomed to the dim twilight, and objects became discernible. I beheld the kings of the subterranean races seated upon thrones—grand old men, though dry, withered, wrinkled like parchment, and blackened with naphtha and bitumen—all wearing *pshents* of gold, and breast-plates and gorgets glittering with precious stones, their eyes immovably fixed like the eyes of sphinxes, and their long beards whitened by the snow of centuries. Behind them stood their peoples, in the stiff and constrained posture enjoined by Egyptian art, all eternally preserving the attitude prescribed by the hieratic law. Behind these nations, the cats, ibixes, and crocodiles contemporary with them, rendered monstrous of aspect by their swathing bands, mewed, flapped their wings, or extended their jaws.

All the Pharaohs were there—Cheops,

Chephrenes, Psammetichus, Sesostris, Amenotaph—all the dark rulers of the pyramids and syrinxes. On yet higher thrones sat Chronos and Xixouthros, who was contemporary with the deluge, and Tubal Cain, who reigned before it.

The beard of the King Xixouthros had grown seven times around the granite table upon which he leaned, lost in deep reverie; buried in dreams.

Farther back, through a dusty cloud, I beheld dimly the seventy-two preadamite kings, with their seventy-two peoples, for ever passed away.

After permitting me to gaze upon this bewildering spectacle a few moments, the Princess Hermonthis presented me to her father Pharaoh, who favoured me with a most gracious sign.

"I have found my foot again! I have found my foot!" cried the princess, clap-

ping her little hands together with every sign of frantic joy. "It was this lord who restored it to me."

The races of Kemi, the races of Nahasi, all the black, bronzed, and copper-coloured nations repeated in chorus—

"The Princess Hermonthis has found her foot again!"

Even Xixouthros himself was affected.

He raised his heavy eyelids, stroked his hair with his fingers, and turned upon me with a glance weighty with centuries.

"By Oms, the dog of hell, and Tmei, daughter of the Sun and Truth, this is a brave and worthy one!" exclaimed Pharaoh, pointing to me with his sceptre, which was terminated with a lotus-flower. "What recompense do you desire?"

Filled with that daring inspired by dreams, in which nothing seems impossible, I asked for the hand of the Princess

Hermonthis—the hand that seemed to me a very proper recompense for the foot.

Pharaoh opened wide his great eyes of glass in astonishment at my witty request.

"What country do you come from, and what is your age?"

"I am a Frenchman, and I am twenty-seven years old, venerable Pharaoh."

"Twenty-seven years old, and he wishes to espouse the Princess Hermonthis, who is thirty centuries old!" cried out all the Thrones and all the circles of Nations.

Only Hermonthis herself did not seem to think my request unreasonable.

"If you were only two thousand years old," replied the ancient king, "I would willingly give you the princess, but the disproportion is too great; and besides, we must give our daughters husbands who will last well. You do not know how to preserve yourselves any longer. Even

those who died only fifteen centuries ago are already no more than a handful of dust. Behold my flesh is as solid as basalt, my bones are bars made of steel. I will be present on the last day of the world with the same body and the same features which I had during my lifetime. My daughter Hermonthis will last longer than a statue of bronze. Then the last particles of your dust will have been scattered by the winds, and even Isis herself, who was able to find the atoms of Osiris, would scarce be able to re-compose your being. See how vigorous I yet remain, and how mighty is my grasp," he added, shaking my hand in the English fashion with a strength that buried my rings in the flesh of my fingers.

He pressed me so hard that I awoke, and found my friend Alfred shaking me by the arm to make me get up.

"Oh, Everlasting sleeper! Must I have you carried out into the middle of the street, and fireworks exploded near your ears? It is afternoon. Do you not recollect your promise to take me with you to see Aguado's Spanish pictures?"

"God! I forgot all—all about it," I answered, dressing myself hurriedly. "We will go there at once. I have the invitation lying there on my desk."

I started to find it, but imagine my utter astonishment when I beheld, instead of the mummy's foot I had purchased the evening before, *the little green paste idol left in its place by the Princess Hermonthis!*

FINIS

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